

HYSSOP

BY M·T·H·
SADLER





THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

HYSSOP

M · T · H · SADLER

has also Translated and
written an Introduction to

THE ART OF SPIRITUAL
HARMONY

By WASSILY KANDINSKY

Illustrated.

6s. net

"The book is something of a revelation. No clearer exposition of post-impressionism has been offered."

Glasgow Herald.

"An excellent translation. Kandinsky is that welcome rarity, a painter who can give his artistic conviction lucid expression in words."

Manchester Guardian.

"Mr. Sadler's admirable introduction."—*Daily News.*

"The book (it is excellently translated) deserves study as the serious work of a single-minded artist."

New Statesman.

CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.

HYSSOP

: A · NOVEL · BY :
M · T · H · SADLER

CONSTABLE & CO. LIMITED
LONDON

First published 1915

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
WM. BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PLYMOUTH

TO BET
MY WIFE
AND
TO TEDDY
MY FRIEND
HYSSOP
MY NOVEL
IS
AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

PR
6037
S126h
Copy 2

74-146

I BUILT a house of crazy rods ;
I lost a diamond in the crypt
Of that great church upon the down ;
I heard men crying to their gods ;
I saw a troop of women, stript
Skin-naked, weeping through the town.

My house has tottered to its fall ;
My jewel lies among the dust
Of powdered bones ; my eyes have seen
The glittering emblems in the tall
Cathedrals tarnished by the rust
Of tears for things that might have been.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BACKGROUND	1
II. FOREGROUND	11
III. LADDIE	28
IV. GOTHIC	85
V. THE FLOWER SHOP	114
VI. SNOW AND FIRE	145
VII. CRAZY RODS	177
VIII. THE GIRL DEBATES	192
IX. THE MAN DECIDES	205
X. THE LETTER IS WRITTEN	220
XI. THE LETTER IS READ	234
XII. LA VIE GALANTE	248
XIII. GOD'S REPUBLIC	272
XIV. BROADWAY LIGHTS	289
XV. HYSSOP	301

HYSSOP

Chapter One

BACKGROUND AND MIDDLE DISTANCE

THE extensive and scientific collecting of pictures is in itself an occupation, and Gordon Murray found that the accumulation of his admirable and almost famous collection left him no time for any other regular work. This would have been of little consequence to his wife and son had his conscience allowed him to follow the example of many men of his kind, and combine personal acquisition with highly profitable amateur dealing. But unfortunately the inheritance from his father of a considerable capital, while freeing him from the necessary hackwork of art critic and historian and setting him free to indulge his passion for collecting, did not bring with it a realisation that capital, however considerable, cannot stand unlimited expenditure without occasional replenishment. This it was not to receive. The strain of six years' strenuous

H Y S S O P

travelling in search of masterpieces, and the finding of more than a few, injured Gordon Murray's health and reduced his income irretrievably. He was never strong, but spared himself nothing in endurance and even privation when on the track of pictures. A time came when the long-threatened lung trouble broke out, and he was compelled to withdraw, a condemned invalid, to a high villa in Switzerland, a country which of all others he disliked. Hitherto he had had no real home. The family house faced the river at Chiswick, and thither he had been accustomed to return from time to time with the trophies of his journeys about the world. But his visits were mere pauses in a life of travel, and he only came to London to leave it again at the earliest opportunity. He now found himself faced with a few years more of life, to be spent in practical immobility in a vivid plaster villa in the lower Alps. Characteristically he insisted that all his more choice possessions should be brought out from England, and the villa was stocked, at considerable expense, with his beloved pictures. The Chiswick house was let; Mrs. Murray and her son Philip came to share the sick father's exile.

At the time of his father's collapse Philip Murray was fourteen years old. He was on the point of going to Marlborough, but found himself instead borne off to Switzerland and entered at a *lycée* at Lausanne. For four years he remained a student there, spending his holidays either with

BACKGROUND

his parents or wandering alone in Northern Italy or Southern France, and living during term in a pastor's family in the town. Every summer took him to the High Alps to climb. It was an understood thing that he was to go to Oxford and he had been entered at Wallace College for a long while. In his eighteenth year he went to England to try for a scholarship or exhibition, failing however to secure anything more glorious than freedom from further examinations. Hardly had he got back to Switzerland than his father died.

Mrs. Murray found herself the possessor of a huge and priceless collection of old masters and practically no money. The expenses of her husband's illness had finally exhausted his resources. She and her son realised that the situation required instant action. The family lawyer came from London and arranged for the raising of sufficient funds on the security of the collection to enable the widow to transport her furniture and belongings, as well as the pictures, once more to Chiswick. The tenants of the old house had been gone a year and considerable repairs were necessary. After some months of extreme discomfort and worry everything was arranged. The pictures, except one or two special favourites, were to be sold at Christie's in a week's time. Mrs. Murray and Philip were installed at Chiswick, in the somewhat harassing position of knowing that on the success of the forthcoming sale depended the entire scale of their future lives. If

HYSSOP

all went well, Oxford began for Philip in the autumn (it was now the end of April). If the sale was a failure, he was to go immediately to America where an almost unknown brother of his father's offered him a place in a business as vague and unattractive as are all businesses in America to Englishmen who want to be undergraduates.

On the whole, however, the sale was a great success. The Spanish pictures even achieved one or two records. The Greco-Goya boom had recently begun and several works by these artists, bought for very little by Mr. Murray in the days of their obscurity, fetched enormous prices. Similarly the late collector's primitives attracted great attention. His Siennese group was unique, and was purchased *en masse* by Gürtner of Pittsburg. There were some disappointments, notably among the later Italians, whose popularity had momentarily been eclipsed, and perhaps the greatest blow was the pronouncement by Dr. Pfüsch of Berlin that one of the big Rembrandts was a late eighteenth century copy. The successes nevertheless greatly outbalanced the failures and Mrs. Murray saw an adequate income for herself and a university education for her son guaranteed. The uncle in America was written to, and replied, after a few weeks, in a blue typewritten letter with reference ciphers at the top, stating his views of the value of Oxford training to after life with the forcibility expected of a self-made commercial magnate.

BACKGROUND

Mrs. Murray was not much moved by her brother-in-law's views. Her husband had instilled into her a horror of all things American, he having to the full the jealous resentment that older, more cultivated but less wealthy civilisations always feel towards the irresistible intrusion of what they term "barbarians oozing with money." "One of the saddest features of these material days," he would say, "is to see America blundering in and trampling, by sheer wealth, on the graceful reticences and treasured possessions of a race whose patronage they have neither the culture to desire nor the intelligence to deserve." Though she knew enough to discount considerably her husband's violence, Mrs. Murray was much relieved that her son was to go to Oxford, and not plunge immediately into the whirl of American commerce. Indeed she planned for him to try for the Civil Service after leaving college, and so avoid America altogether. Certainly she had no wish for him to leave her to the necessarily solitary life of one who, after several years abroad and in close attendance on a sick man, returns to live in outlying London. Also her ideas were not untinged by the conventional preference for a profession rather than a trade. She was a placid, rather unemotional woman who had long ago ceased to marvel at the tricks that fortune could play her. The erratic life led in the wake of an erratic husband, subject himself to all the ups and downs of the artistic temperament, had made equanimity not only advisable

H Y S S O P

but essential. But under the easy-going tolerance imposed on her by circumstances Mrs. Murray had the foundations of the training given to the ordinary girl of the upper middle-class in England, and there were occasions when, in intercourse with her, one went, so to speak, into the cellars of her mind and caught a glimpse of those foundations. For instance, she always called a bitch a "lady dog," and she "perspired" but never "sweated." Probably these euphemisms, and the few others of their kind, had survived because in intercourse with her husband the subjects had never arisen. Mr. Murray had lived for pictures and pictures alone; such banalities as animals, over-exertion or race propagation never occupied his mind.

In her dealings with her son Mrs. Murray had always shown a wise aloofness. He had had his liberty at Lausanne and such religious feelings as his parents possessed had never been imposed on him. He had brought his small perplexities and troubles to his mother and she had dealt with them calmly and soothingly. But the more secret and stormy trials of adolescence he had undergone alone, partly because, like most boys, he was not sufficiently familiar with his parents to share them, partly also from an instinct that his mother would fail to grasp the force with which they assailed him.

He was, however, his mother's son in a general reposefulness of mind. He had regarded the freedom of life at Lausanne with level and in-

BACKGROUND

curious eyes. He had been no Galahad—what Latin schoolboy is ?—but his experiences had left him unexcited, even a little tired. It was with the same placidity that he regarded the alternatives of America and Oxford, though the final adoption of the latter was, on the whole, pleasing to him. His solitary school life—for the intimacies of day-pupils at a *lycée* are not to be compared with those of the English public school—had bred in him a self-reliance, which gave his unemotional nature a quality of age beyond its actual years. He was not brilliant, not even clever, but an innate intelligence, quickened by independence and the society of people older than himself, stood him in good stead in most company. French and German were, naturally, as familiar to him as English; and he had read rather widely the modern literature of both languages. His knowledge of Italian and Spanish was adequate for travelling or easy reading. Towards the classics, whether in the sense of Greek and Latin or of the hallowed products of English, French and German literature, he was badly disposed. Possibly his father's absorption in the painting of the past reacted on his son. Certainly Mr. Murray had no good word to say for modern art, and Philip's verdict on the literature of the past was no less unfavourable and unfounded.

In appearance, as well as in nature, Philip Murray resembled his mother. He was of medium height, with an open, rather pale face, square

H Y S S O P

cheekbones and a large straight mouth with firm full lips. His hair was fair and straight but inclined to be rebellious. He was strongly and almost sturdily made, with very small hands and feet. His eyes, which were large and very dark grey, made at least attractive an appearance that, but for them, was ordinary enough.

As the time drew near for going up to Oxford he felt a sensation hitherto strange to him, a growing shyness, which at times bordered on real fright. The isolation of his school-days would leave him solitary among groups of intimates. All his conventions would be different to those of the public schoolboy. The very facts that he was older in mind, that he spoke French and German, that he did not know the names and averages of county cricketers, the betting on and past performances of race-horses, alike his knowledge and his ignorance would handicap him at college. To conclude the psychology of Oxford to be that of a public school and the psychology of Wallace to be that of any other college was a mistake that he could not be expected to have avoided or to recognise himself as having made. Wallace had frightened him when he was in Oxford for a scholarship a year ago. He confessed to himself as the hansom stopped at Wallace porch on his first afternoon as an undergraduate that his courage was little greater now than it was then.

But Wallace for all its superciliousness (reputed) and its exclusiveness (acknowledged) possessed and prided itself upon the most irresistible porter

BACKGROUND

in Oxford. Philip felt an almost normal quietude and satisfaction as the rotund cheerful figure bade him welcome to the college. It was the secret of Peters' fascination, and a secret quite unrecognised by its possessor, that he never allowed the fame or obscurity of any undergraduates to make the smallest difference to his efficiency and courtesy in their service. The rest of the university said he was the only gentleman in Wallace. Wallace men themselves acknowledged that he was their most perfect specimen. From the natural good manners of Peters, Philip passed to the more commercial but undeniably gratifying subservience of his scout, who bustled about the freshman's somewhat gloomy room with determined garrulence. Philip, straining his ears to glean hints on the thousand points of college etiquette which he would soon have to face, gave the attempt up as hopeless. Even his skilfully nonchalant questions elicited no information of the slightest value. When Philip had come down from Oxford and was asked for "tips" on behaviour by those about to go up he realised the impossibility of telling anyone the things they really want to know and can only find out for themselves. Perhaps then, if he thought about it, he forgave Grubb his evasions and vaguenesses. Certainly on this first lonely evening, when the charm of Peters had worn off, he went to his strange bed with a feeling of apprehensive ignorance of the life which was to begin in real earnest on the morrow. But when he awoke and

HYSSOP

prepared to meet the events of the day his apprehension had given place to frank curiosity, which, as dreaded pitfalls were one after another passed by in safety, became in its turn uncritical and undisguised enjoyment.

Chapter Two

FOREGROUND

I

JUST as each morning brings to any large business house a pile of fresh letters which lie jostling one another on the desk until someone with authority to open them arrives and sorts them among the various departments of the office, so each batch of freshmen at an Oxford college live the opening weeks of their Varsity life in uncritical promiscuity among themselves, until experience and self-confidence ally them to one or another of the varied and often mutually hostile cliques of which the longer-lived hinterland of the college is composed. Such at any rate was Philip's experience, and he found to his relief that the lack of definite school continuity which he had dreaded was to handicap him very little, if at all. He was too fresh as yet to know the Wallace convention of disliking everyone until you know him ; indeed, his very freshness bred in him the other extreme of seeing lifelong friendships in every chance acquaintance of those early weeks. Certainly if he had, in his third year, paused to enumerate those of his

HYSSOP

contemporaries with whom he had been intimate once, the recital would have been alike lengthy and, at that distance of time, incredible. But such detachment was not yet, and his first impressions of his "year" were of a roseate uniformity. Everyone seemed "jolly." Hall was jolly, petrified breakfasts were jolly, even "tubbing" was jolly. His tutor was charming, the work was easy. Philip felt none of the dreariness often attributed to fictional personages in his position. True, it was a bore not knowing how one ordered tea, but the ordeal of three cowardly teas at Strong's the confectioner's conquered dignity, and the fourth day saw Philip shamelessly sleuthing an experienced stranger to the species of score board on which the afternoon appetites of the college were duly avowed and signed.

But time was soon to bring its discontents, its desires for companionship more satisfying than that of mere necessity. Philip could not repress a longing to master what he knew only experience could teach him, and prominent among his worries were the multitude of small breaches of rule which college convention had created. For weeks he did not know just how late and how undressed a candidate for a morning roll call might, without penalty, be. He was bothered out of all proportion by the purely academic problem of when one could call the dons by their Christian names and whether, during the period before that privileged moment, it was not worse than familiar to address them as "Mister." Of course, when

FOREGROUND

the time came it took him unawares and he found himself almost unconsciously treating his instructors as, at most, equals.

The dons of Wallace, like the meringues at the House or washable collars at Keble, were a college speciality. They were almost all really very popular and almost all impartially mocked at and abused. Professional requirements brought him first of all into contact with his Mods. Tutor Gregory Plarr. Of this man Philip began with a wholesome dread which developed into a half-awestruck affection. His tutor had a manner of ineffable dryness, an inscrutable almost stunted countenance and an immense efficiency. There was no doubt that the numerous successes in Honour Mods. (and ultimately in Greats) scored by Wallace men were largely due to the dour but brilliant training received in early terms from Plarr. The man was remarkable in Wallace for his distant attitude to his pupils. No chattering throng crowded his rooms at night, no one, not even his fellow-dons, ever aspired to his Christian name much less to anything less respectful. His innate shyness and reserve bred reserve in others, but never (and this was perhaps the strangest thing of all) did his shyness degenerate into the repressive haughtiness of the average school-master. Under the often glacial eye of this sphinx-like but eternally stimulating instructor Philip spent his first five scholastic terms. The apologetic uncertainties of the philosopher-under-secretary, a born civil servant whose fellowship

H Y S S O P

was a misfortune to the Treasury, destined to take up the burden of tutorship after Mods. were over, contrasted in Philip's mind unfavourably with the pinched but unerring comments of the earlier régime.

Of the other Fellows and Lecturers of Wallace, Philip was to become intimate with one or two, vaguely hostile to one or two more, and to remain unacquainted with the rest. The beginning of his friendship with Trafford, or, as he was known half the world over, "Trips," was a very early happening in his career, occurring in point of fact in his third week. The enchanting variety of his fellow freshmen was already giving way to subtle avoidances and, vice versa, to equally subtle rebuffs. The hour was eleven forty-five, an hour which of all others in college life demands an intimate friend. It is too late to work and too early to go to bed. One's own room is hateful, one's own company a desolation. The Junior Common Room, never more than a *pis aller*, is just plunging into darkness. The lights in the quad are about to follow suit. Here and there from behind lighted blinds come laughter, snatches of song, strange oaths. But for the friendless one there is no refuge. Philip was undergoing the spirit of the hour to the utmost. There was no one he liked or knew sufficiently well to seek out at this time of intimacies. Disconsolately he had wandered to the porch, derived a gleam of comfort from the magnetic geniality of old Peters the porter, read several notices that he knew by heart already and

FOREGROUND

in comparison to the reperusal of which going to bed was a thrill, and was on his lonely way back to his lonely room when a figure came up behind him in the now darkened quadrangle and said in a friendly voice "Who is this?"

"Murray," said Philip, rather embarrassed, for he recognised Trafford and felt the occasion demanded further conversational contribution, all ideas for which were notably lacking.

"Come up and have something to drink—or are you turning in?"

Philip murmured confused acquiescence, and together they walked towards the spiral stair leading to Trafford's rooms, the don chattering mildly about the great trees in the quad, the freshman divided in mind between a great relief at his rescue from an unwanted bed-time and a vague fear of being plunged into a brilliant and senior society, talking their brilliant and senior "shop" in the rooms to which he was going.

The lights in Trafford's rooms were all burning, and as they crossed the threshold Philip saw they had one occupant, a very small, slim man with a very fair moustache and none too much chin, who was laboriously building a pagoda of Trafford's cigarettes on a small table by the fire. He looked up casually as the two came in, smiled gently and said: "I'm having fearful fun, Trips. I shall get it thirty stories high I believe if your bally cigarettes hold out," with which observation he returned to his building.

"Trips" beamed vaguely and turning to Philip

H Y S S O P

offered him a choice of lemonade or whiskey, of which Philip selected the former. While a glass was being sought and the drink being poured out, he stood self-consciously regarding the fire, the sofa, the pagoda builder and the fire again, his awkwardness rather increased than diminished by the utter indifference to his presence shown by the architect in tobacco.

Trafford, coming towards him with a glass of lemonade, must have seen his embarrassment as he said with his half-abrupt, half-listless friendliness :

“Chick, this is Mr. Murray. Mr. Murray—Lord Arncliffe. Come and get warm,” he went on to Philip, “this object needn’t take up all the fire.”

“Chick ” Arncliffe, beyond a lazy glance at the new-comer and a slight nod, had taken no notice whatever of the interruption and was continuing his pagoda, when an unlucky movement of Philip’s, on his way towards the fire, jogged the table and the whole erection of cigarettes came rustling and pattering down.

“I say,” began Philip, “I’m awfully sorry——”

Trafford laughed aloud and the unfortunate freshman trembled at his clumsiness. But the accident made no more impression on the small fair man than had Philip’s entrance into the room. He picked up one or two of the cigarettes which had fallen on to the floor and threw them with the rest on to the table. Then, looking vaguely round, he collected a commoner’s gown from one

FOREGROUND

chair, a notebook from another and lounged to the door, saying as he went: "Well—so long, Trips. Going to bye-bye," and vanished.

Trafford scooped the pile of cigarettes into their box, murmuring something about "charming fellow at bottom, Chick——," and began to talk to Philip about the Near East.

The conversation trickled on and inclined to languish, but Philip was happy enough to lie in the deep arm-chair gazing about the big lofty room with its bookcases, its water-colours of Palestine and its countless brown photographs of young men, while Trafford talked, crouching like a genial monkey on the firestool and playing with the poker.

"Who is your tutor?" asked the don at last.

"Mr. Plarr."

"Of course you're a Greats man. You won't then be interested in this new collection of contemporary French Revolution letters and memoirs," he motioned towards a pile of four or five large blue volumes, evidently just bought, which heaped a neighbouring chair. Then passing on, with that unemotional pleasantness which struck Philip as the characteristic of all his conversation, he said:

"I really don't know how I am going to find room for all my books. So many interesting ones come out, don't you think so? Or aren't you a book buyer?"

Philip, in his placid state of coma, felt nothing could be more delightful than to live surrounded

H Y S S O P

by memoirs and remarked that he “had *some* books, but hope now to be able to see the new ones better as they came out. You see though I live at Chiswick, it’s a long way to the centre of London—much abroad—since father died——” He was drifting on into family confidences, so soothing was the peaceful warmth of this quiet room, when he realised first of all that Trafford was not very interested, if indeed he was listening at all, and secondly that trampling feet were ascending the stairs. His shyness returned at once and he prayed, though he knew it was in vain, that the feet would pass Trafford’s door. They drew nearer and there burst into the room four or five young men in evening clothes, all rather flushed and all evidently highly cheerful. Philip’s instinct was instant flight but he was checked by Trafford in his quiet way, and when the new-comers had claimed the host’s attention it was too late. So he sank back in his chair and longed for invisibility.

It soon appeared from the noisy conversation that followed that Tommy had been having a twenty-firster. A somewhat longer period revealed Tommy to be a Hebraic youth in a grey dress waistcoat who wore a gold wrist-watch on a bangle and whose majority had evidently descended upon him in fat green bottles with gold leaf about their corks. He was not the sole representative of his race among the group, as two at least of the others had reached Oxford from God via Jordan, but wealth and care had eliminated

FOREGROUND

all traces of the route except in their cast of countenance.

Most sprawled on Trafford's sofa and chairs, while one embraced the don who now stood with his hands in his pockets wedged between the hearth curb and the mantelpiece. None of them vouchsafed Philip more than a cursory glance.

"Felicitations, Tommy," said Trafford, bowing to the hero of the evening.

"Thanks, Trips. We had a damn good time. Fizz wasn't bad, was it?"

"Do we look as if it was?" roared a heavy individual with a very deep bass voice, whose name turned out to be Montague. "Cockles tried to pinch the waiter's behind every time he came near. The poor man had a terrible time." And the speaker guffawed loudly.

"Cockles," whom Philip thought looked the most attractive of the group, smiled broadly and said in rather a metallic high-pitched voice:

"You needn't talk, Louis. That wasn't much of an affair of yours with the salt-cellars, was it?"

The interchange of badinage continued, while Philip considered a thousand means of getting away. The dull and tiresome opulence of these people bored him. How could Trafford endure it? But the host was listening with patient tolerance, now and then putting in a word to one or another of the revellers. Plainly the effects of the dinner had been at their gaudiest long before the party had come up to see Trafford and were now wearing off momentarily. As time went on

HYSSOP

the group began to yawn, and one or two got sullen and morose. At last Louis Montague stretched his great carcase, yawned noisily and announced his intention of going to bed. He lurched off, followed by his companions, shouting good nights to Trafford, and Philip heard them stumble down the stairs in the dark and go singing off across the quad. Trafford made no remark whatever, but began moving rather restlessly about the room. Philip, glancing at his watch, found it was nearly two o'clock and with a shy "Good night, thank you very much," groped his way to his own rooms. As he undressed he marvelled a little at the tolerance of a man like Trafford who could endure with such unceritcal geniality the crudities of so many types of so many recurring generations of undergraduates.

As his time at Oxford went on he was to become a frequent visitor in the small hours to the great room with the brown photographs and the water-colours. Though he never lost this realisation of the self-complacent condescension with which each new layer of undergraduates treated their host (at times their casual acceptance of his patient kindness stirred him to a kind of anger), his admiration and sense of gratitude to the man who alone succeeded in being a friend, if not to all, at least to a large number of the chaotically varied Wallace cliques, was never quite free from the mystification which unceritcal older minds always cause to that of critical youth. He never failed to oppose that hostility to Trips which

FOREGROUND

accused him of snobbery, because the very wideness with which the don's net was cast precluded such a charge. No one with pretensions to snobbery would, he felt, bother to be a real intimate of Philip Murray's, and yet Trips was as constantly kind to him as to any of his contemporaries.

II

Among the freshmen of Wallace this year were two whose acquaintance with Philip was destined to strengthen to friendship. Their difference from each other, and the fact that they never became more than nodding acquaintances between themselves despite their common intimacy with Philip, marks a characteristic feature in the latter's career at Oxford. His adaptable and rather varied nature responded readily to various kinds of appeal, and he never lost his affection for and sympathy with either Jack Cartwright or Dallas Merrick, although neither of them was the friend he was to know most closely and continually.

Jack Cartwright was a Rugbeian. Large, athletic and possessed of an inexhaustible fund of good temper, he succeeded admirably with most things he took up, merely because the problem of success never worried him. His crisp brown curly hair, his rather full mouth with its small moustache, his great hands and limbs,

HYSSOP

gave him the appearance of a lady novelist's hero. But the similarity ended at appearances, for no lady novelist would have tolerated the unself-conscious clumsiness of his social and intellectual manners. Everywhere popular, he enjoyed as much as those who made them, the continual thrusts at his conventionality, his endless gallantries and violent but short-lived amours, his fatal tendency to social "floaters." Hardly could he go to a private dance without criticising the floor or the supper to his host, anti-Semitic stories rose irresistibly to his lips when in Hebraic company, broken cups and spilt tea marked his afternoon's progress at calling times. But the blunt exuberance of his apologies, the zest with which he related his misadventures endeared him to all, so that hardly among his victims could any be found who would have wished him otherwise.

Dallas Merrick was a Rhodes Scholar and an American. There is a current saying in England that "no one is nicer than a *nice* American"—the emphasised word throwing a sinister suggestion at the less favoured section of that great republic. Dallas Merrick was emphatically a "nice" American, which, in English parlance, means that he was not blatant or pretentious, that he did not wear absurd hats and shoes and that he was capable of talking nonsense. He was travelled and cosmopolitan, but his advantage in years over many of the English undergraduates would not have been suspected in his manner,

FOREGROUND

which, with a rare instinct, he turned to his surroundings.

It was with an incipient sense of reliance on these two new friends that Philip embarked on the perilous voyage to find a congenial haven. His barque put into several ports before she found one which promised permanent harbourage, but between each misadventure she always connected in middle channel with those of Cartwright and Merrick, before parting to further discoveries.

One of the earliest ports of call, a harbour which rather thrust itself in the path of the wanderer than one which required seeking out, was that of the evangelical philanthropists. These men formed a small but compact group in the college, dividing their time between raising the moral tone of the Oxford slums in a very muscular and hearty manner and drinking cocoa or light beer in each other's rooms. They all went to see the Gilbert and Sullivan operas whenever they came to the theatre, considering that these plays struck a happy mean between the musical comedy whose costumes began too late and ended too early, and the intellectual drama whose sociological curiosity began too early and ended too late. This skilful discrimination between the old and the new was applied equally to the comedy of manners, only over a necessarily longer period. For seeking a mean between the wantonness of Farquhar and the indiscretions of modern French farce, they alighted unerringly upon the subtleties and humour of "Our Boys," "Are You a

H Y S S O P

Mason ? ” “ The Private Secretary,” and plays of the same period. In later life those of them who became journalists showed their sincerity by hailing each revival of these time-honoured comedies with such phrases as “ How clean and sweet seems this humour in these morbid and degenerate days,” or “ Wholesome and ever fresh, the old favourite outshone in its healthy fun half a dozen so-called intellectual plays,” and so on.

“ The Bunch,” as this knot of enthusiasts was called in Wallace, was personified to Philip in one Brett, a pale and sandy youth of an ineffable blandness, who beamed himself into the freshman’s room one evening with, as Philip afterwards said, “ bronze crosses clanking on every limb,” and embarked on an over-cheery conversation about the college food. So brightly and determinedly did he grumble at the beef, so eagerly smiling was his denunciation of the Brussels Sprouts, that Philip felt a terrible gloom descending upon him as he listened, a gloom only lightened by an invincible belief in the excellence of these two features of the college menu. Brett had pretensions to raciness and knowledge of the world, that is to say he told stories that always seemed on the point of becoming improper but never quite did. The blame of having related them in the first instance he always laid on some one else, showing a similar disinterested generosity in naming those whose prudery was responsible for their not being tellable to all and sundry.

FOREGROUND

This ingenious procedure not only absolved Brett himself from all blame, but admitted his hearer to a kind of privileged freemasonry of tolerance and good fellowship.

Philip, however, never recovered from his first dislike of Brett, and consequently was abandoned by the Bunch as a flippant, if not a positively vicious heathen. He reciprocated the hostility and used to speak of the Bunch as "horribly whited, but not even sepulchres."

He next had a short *liason* with the politicians. He joined a well-dressed Liberal club, the members of which, being mostly either themselves actually of the aristocracy or closely allied to it by custom and friendship, could properly be expected to realise the need for its abolition. In this *milieu* he first realised a phenomena which is not unfamiliar in England—the bitter hostility of Liberal and Tory except at the dinner-table (usually the Tory's, who knows more about food) or on the race-course (usually the Liberal's, who is more familiar with the evils of betting).

Philip's political career was brief. He read a paper on foreign politics which was warmly applauded, because, true to party principles, his hearers knew nothing whatever about them and were consequently impressed by the reader's pronunciation of foreign names. He found it, however, increasingly difficult to remember the dates of the meetings and finally impossible to pay his subscription. The amalgamation of the society with a rival one, whose tenets were found

HYSSOP

to be strangely identical at the call of financial stringency, gave him an opportunity of resigning, an opportunity which he eagerly took.

A by-product of the political period of Philip's career was more picturesque. It was even briefer so far as Oxford was concerned, but it included his first Easter vacation, and terminated partly for very real financial reasons and partly by mutual agreement between himself and the group to which he became temporarily allied.

This membership of the aristocratic Liberal club brought him into contact with Louis Montague and his friend "Cockles," or, more properly, Francis Boldrewood, known to his scout as "The Honnecruble Boldreywud." He found reason, now he was their intimate, to revise the unfavourable estimate framed of them that night in Trafford's room, for their idea of exclusiveness was to be deliberately offensive to everybody else, and perfectly charming to each other. To Cockles in particular Philip got quite attached. The group found Philip amusing and presentable. Accordingly for two weeks at the end of his second term, the whole of the following vacation, and for half the summer term he led their hectic and expensive life, enjoying himself immensely and giving legitimate offence to his contemporaries, who resented the loftiness with which he bore himself in his new, exalted company. He golfed, motored, dined and lounged away the greater part of his time and all his money. He "did" the night side of London in the most magnifi-

FOREGROUND

cent manner, making the acquaintance all too thoroughly of theatrical ladies, whose photographs should have been more than sufficient. He bought lots of clothes and no books. He played roulette and baccarat, smoking expensive cigars and drinking expensive liqueurs the while. He read with nerve-racking zest strange and badly printed stories originally produced in Aden or New York and pasted leaf by leaf into harmless-looking notebooks with "History Lectures A" on the outside.

The middle of the summer term found him beggared and nervous. His flagging spirits made him cross and offensively critical, and it was to the benefit and relief both of his friends and himself that the partnership was gently, but none the less determinedly, dissolved. The end left him isolated and rather bitter. He suffered justly for his recent self-importance and swollen head in the unconcealed satisfaction of his "year" that the mighty had fallen. Only Jack and Dallas allowed the episode to make no difference to them, and not the least part of his gratitude to them during the rest of their friendship was due to their tact and discretion at a time when normal youth was undergoing one of its cruellest punishments—the realisation that it had behaved like a snob, and that snobbery was inherently foreign to its tastes and nature.

Chapter Three

LADDIE

I

BUT Oxford memories are short, and the long vacation obliterated from the minds of most Philip's recent experiment in "climbing." He entered on his second year in as good a position as ever for new experiences and friendships. In the meantime his contemporaries had been equally but perhaps less gracefully busy adjusting and readjusting their groups and relations. Already they had fallen in and out of their first series of cliques, already societies which were to last for ever and regenerate the university had entered on and departed their vivid and precarious existence. Philip had found time, except at the most concentrated moments of his own career, to follow with comparative accuracy the rapid formation and even more rapid dissolution of those lifelong friendships which had fluttered the career of his companions. Wallace was a large college and a clever college. Its units were nearly all of them in one way or another definite and individual. The delicate problem of "finding a level" became in conse-

quence a very real and very hazardous one, and Philip found, as his Oxford career went by, that not until a generation had arrived at its third year of residence could the groups among the men be considered really permanent. Rigid divisions between different years were unknown. After the first term or two a freshman was indistinguishable in anything but the amount of his leisure. Senior men in many of the smaller colleges gave a series of wholly mechanical breakfast parties to the freshmen, covering between them nearly the whole ground. This in Wallace was not only impossible but contrary to the college *stimmung*. And that is why Philip was in his second year before he received an invitation to tea from John Franklin. Franklin was a brilliant Greats man in his third year, chiefly famous for a paper, nominally on Pragmatism, which he had read his second term to the college philosophical society. This paper had challenged the deepest bases of Wallace philosophical tradition in such a sweeping fashion that the Master, Dr. Matthews (the world-known scholar and author of "Kant and Christianity"), had lost his temper in defending the threatened position.

Franklin's parties were somewhat renowned and Philip felt that the ceremony might be an ordeal. As he had his bath after a particularly muddy game of rugger (his rowing activities had succumbed to selection in his second term), he wondered who would be of the party, also how many there would be altogether. He dressed,

H Y S S O P

filled his tobacco pouch, and crossed the damp greyness of the quad to Franklin's staircase. The sound of voices as he knocked at the door gave him a twinge of shyness, for his set of last term had kept him as isolated from the life of the college as they were themselves. The room seemed crowded with people. The hearth was stacked high with dishes of toast and muffins ; the light of the fire threw a cheerful flicker on the book-lined walls ; every chair and sofa seemed occupied with garrulous humanity.

"Hullo, Murray. D'you know everyone. Mister Grant, Mr. Trench, Mr. Stratton, Mr. Macallister, Mr. Thompson—Mr. Murray—Cartwright and Merrick you know. Sit down."

Franklin, having swept the room with this collective introduction, kicked a *pouf* from under the table and went on making the tea. The other guests had stopped talking to give the newcomer the nod or grunt which Oxford welcomes permit, and now plunged once more into the interrupted conversation.

"No—she was ill when I was there. An understudy played the part. Great bore—as I went to see her specially."

"She's not been playing lately. What's happened ?"

"Gone to America in the 'Four Roses,' that play of Wilding's that was censored."

Philip was looking round him. He watched Franklin, small and fair, bending over the kettle, with his unemotional pink face and chubby

hands. It seemed hard to realise that this boy was everywhere marked down for a great career as thinker and teacher. His eyes travelled to the sofa near the fire on which, in an attitude of peaceful ease, there lolled a slim dark-haired and rather beautiful youth with lilac silk socks and a tie to match. Philip knew Ian Macallister by sight well enough, who didn't? but he had never spoken to him. He felt, as he looked at the studied elegance of pose, the thin white hands, the languid eyes, the same half-unwilling attraction that distant glimpses of Macallister had caused him previously. The chance of knowing "Laddie," as Macallister was universally called, gave him a feeling of eagerness. Why, he hardly knew. All that he had heard of Laddie, the rash and usually inaccurate gossip of other freshmen anxious to show a knowledge of college life, showed him to be indolent, rather affected and possessed of a curious taste for erotic simile and anecdote. But there was something in the boy's gentleness of manner that suggested to Philip the possibility of other things lying behind this rather unattractive reputation. As he mused, Laddie broke into the conversation, which had turned apparently into a discussion of the eternal problem of censorship.

"You are being ridiculous, my dear George. You know as well as I do that the only reason why girls aren't allowed to appear naked on the stage is that no decent girl would do so, and no one wants to pay ten-and-six to see any other

HYSSOP

sort. It can be done much cheaper. The censorship is our way of apologising for female purity. Because we Englishmen can't destroy women's ideals, we take refuge in blaming each other for wanting to, and consequently the theatre is a kind of public laundry for underclothes. Morality doesn't enter into it. Men have no morality—they only have unlimited powers of hypocrisy. As for parsons and conservative country gentlemen who talk about the purity of the home, I spit upon them. It's just cant, pure and simple; the cant of baffled lust."

"The Offertory will be for church expenses," said George Stratton solemnly. "I must ask you to wait three minutes while I tear this muffin from the embraces of the plate, and then I will annihilate you utterly. Yes—two, please." This to Franklin who had poured out and was about to distribute the teacups. The diversion broke the thread of the discussion and when tea was finally handed round Franklin turned to a scared freshman in the corner and asked him how he liked rowing. The victim was about to reply when Laddie broke in :

"John always asks everyone that. I believe wideawake and commercially inclined freshmen make quite a lot of money by betting it will be the first remark John makes to them. They always win."

Franklin laughed. "Ass, Laddie. I believe in choosing topics in which no one is in the least interested because it provides a neutral surface

on which their personality leaves an impress. Then I make my diagnosis. It's an old fallacy that you should talk his particular 'shop' to each fresh acquaintance you make. Now it is clear that Thompson dislikes rowing very much (I heard his views over the bath partition yesterday), but he knows that George here is one of our river-heroes. He is in a quandary. I wished to see how he would extricate himself."

"I think," said Thompson gloomily, "that there must be an element of self-mortification in rowing—even for the Olympians."

"I'm sure there is," put in Philip. "I have a cousin who was a 'blue' at Cambridge, and though he'd rather die than say so to the sort of old gentleman who rubs his hands and says—'Makes a man of a lad—in my days—knocked the nonsense out of you'—you know the kind—he's confessed to me that the best part of it was after it was over."

Laddie laughed a little. "I have an uncle of the type you mean. He hates me because I dislike billiards and wear soft shirts in the evening. He was saying one evening that the public schools had made England what it is. I agreed with him so heartily that he was suspicious and got quite red in the face and asked what the hell I meant. I hadn't the heart to tell him."

George Stratton spoke in his deliberate rumbling voice. "What you say about rowing

HYSSOP

is true in a sense. But I think war or work of any sort are also more fun when they're over—John will tell you the exact psychological phenomena, but I confess I look forward to tea all the afternoon while I'm sweating on the river."

"That's not psychological, George dear," interposed Laddie, "it's gastric."

George continued :

"All the same there should be a foundation of enjoyment. I don't believe in driving fellows to row who don't fundamentally care about it. Some do, others don't. One can usually tell. I don't think that Thompson will ever make an oarsman because he doesn't seem to have the rowing instinct very strongly. And I'm not being intentionally offensive either—it's not a thing to be acquired. Like the collecting instinct or the——"

"Philoprogenitive," suggested Laddie.

"——or any other kind of instinct—you have it or you haven't. Still," he ended with a smile, "you'll be kept on at it for a term or two. Till after Toggers I expect—we're so short of freshers who row this year."

"But I never said I disliked it," protested poor Thompson, "I only meant——"

"Meant you didn't care for it? I know. Now Cartwright loved it from the first—didn't you?" Jack Cartwright, tempestuous as ever, declared he thought it "ripping," and trod on his teacup. Everyone laughed at the confusion. When

peace was re-established Merrick suddenly turned to Laddie :

“Macallister,” he said solemnly, “do I understand that you would merely abolish the censorship entirely or substitute one forbidding the production of plays which did not contain some incentive to immorality ?”

Everyone, including Laddie, roared.

“Splendid,” said Franklin ; “he’s got you, Laddie.” But Merrick did not smile. His grave American face hardly moved. Only a twinkle in his eyes betrayed any consciousness of sarcasm. Laddie replied :

“Oh no—I should leave it to the good sense of the British Public to tolerate no play that supported in any way either ‘the British home’ or ‘common decency’ or the ‘bulldog breed’ or any of the disastrous fetishes that have, like my uncle’s public schools, made England what it is. Let us think of the immortal classics of dramatic literature.” Laddie waved an oratorical hand. “‘*Ædipus Rex*,’ ‘*Lysistrata*,’ ‘*Hamlet*,’ ‘*Othello*,’ ‘*Measure for Measure*,’ ‘*Phèdre*,’ ‘*Faust*,’ ‘*All for Love*,’ ‘*A School for Scandal*,’ ‘*Ghosts*,’ ‘*Hedda Gabler*,’ ‘*The Father*,’ ‘*Frühlingserwachen*,’ ‘*Les Avariés*,’ ‘*Mrs. Warren’s Profession*,’ ‘*The Merry Widow*,’ ‘*A Sister to Assist ’er*’—and a thousand others—do they not every one constitute an attack on the miserable pretences and smugnesses of social conventions ? Do they not all——”

“These muffins,” said George Stratton windily,

HYSSOP

"are the vilest I ever tasted. They are cold, tough, and taste of gas. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, John, offering us such filth. They lie heavily on the stomach, they clot the blood——"

"George, George—I'll never speak of plays again if you'll only not talk about your stomach. George's stomach," Laddie continued to the room at large, "is like a child; it should neither be seen, heard, nor spoken of."

Trent, a serious, rather streaky looking man who read science, turned to Merrick. "Have you no censorship in the States at all?"

"Not exactly; no. The power to suppress plays and works of art is vested in the municipal officials of the various cities. Often the disapproval of a policeman is sufficient to terminate the career of a play. I think we are even worse placed than you are. In Boston, for instance, the power in municipal politics is almost always in the hands of the Irish-American Catholics. We can therefore count on no toleration of anything that offends the curiously delicate susceptibilities of these hybrids. A manager is at the mercy of political expediency and religious prejudice."

"Not much fun being a manager then?"

"It certainly is not. Why, when the Irish players were in Boston for the first time, the local authorities prepared a gala reception for the first night. But the plays were either over the heads of the Irish-American audience, or offensive to their scruples. You heard, of course, about

the reception the 'Playboy' received. You can't count on them. And the same with pictures."

"Personally," said Cartwright, "I like to know what kind of play I'm in for. Can't take a girl to some things, you know. Damned awkward. Went with me sister once to see 'The Top Dog'—never so embarrassed in me life."

"Was your sister embarrassed?" enquired Laddie sweetly.

"Well—no—she didn't say anything, of course, but a chap always knows."

"But would you have enjoyed the play otherwise?"

"Yes, awfully. There was a damned funny scene when the man comes to the country house and finds that his bag, which has been unpacked, belongs to some woman, and her night-dress and things are laid out on the bed—then——"

"I saw the play," said Laddie quietly. There was an instant's rather awkward silence. Franklin hurried to restore general ease by changing the conversation to current college topics. But Philip had been struck by Laddie's last remarks and the way in which they had been spoken. It was clear that he disliked both the play and Cartwright's attitude. But how did this reconcile with his extravagant opinions of a few minutes earlier? Which of the two moods was the sincere one, for no reconciliation seemed possible? Philip began to hope there was an

HYSSOP

explanation of the divergence, to hope almost feverishly that Laddie had not talked merely for effect. He was aware that much of Laddie's talk was superficial and even cheap, but his charm and vivacity of manner made his poorest epigram amusing, and Philip was more impressed than ever with the almost melancholy gentleness of the other's eyes.

Almost a week later he had an opportunity for further investigation. Laddie asked him to tea—the invitation was given at the end of a debate at a society to which Philip had been elected.

As he entered Laddie's room, which was high and rather large, and in semi-darkness, he was struck at once by its peaceful feeling. The panelled walls were white; against a deep grey carpet the black linen of the furniture covers was mournfully soothing; a line of glass-fronted book-cases ran down the longest wall of the room; on a plain oak stool in a gleaming brass pot stood an immense blue hydrangea; a small table near the fire was heaped with papers and books, among them preponderating the yellow covers of French books and the violet wrapper of the *Mercure de France*. Laddie, a cigarette between his lips, was playing softly on a baby-grand that curved shiningly from the window that faced the door, its polished top bare except for a strip of some material, which was, so far as Philip could see, thrown across it with almost studied carelessness.

"Come in," said Laddie without stopping his play. Philip crossed to an arm-chair and sat down. The kettle simmered on the hob; the standard electric lamp threw a halo on to the littered table on which it stood, and the outer rim of light touched the milky blue flowers of the hydrangea; of Laddie little could be seen but the glowing end of his cigarette and a shadowy suggestion of form lit up now and then by a spurt of flame from the fire, which died immediately and mingled again with the myriad points of reflection from the polished side of the piano. Through the uncurtained windows Philip could see the moist greyness of the Oxford autumn evening. For some minutes Laddie continued to play, and Philip, sucking at his pipe, stared into the fire. A drowsiness crept over him. The room smelt strangely sweet. He shook himself and glanced at the pile of books and papers. A familiar name caught his eye and he picked up a yellow volume of Verhaeren's poems. It was the Second Series and in a moment he was lost in the sombre rhythms of "Le Moulin."

. . . Il tourne et tourne, et sa voile couleur de lie
Est triste et faible et lourde et lasse infiniment. . . .

He read on slowly, his mind revelling in the splendid dignity of the words. When he reached the last section of the octet he was in the grip of the poetry, and unconsciously began to read aloud, at first softly then more loudly—

HYSSOP

“ Et dans la plaine immense et le vide dormeur
Elles fixent—les très souffreteuses bicoques !
Avec les pauvres yeux de leurs carreaux en locques
Le vieux moulin qui tourne et, las, qui tourne et meurt.”

Philip started suddenly. Some other voice had joined in that last line. Looking up, he saw that his host was crossing the shadowy room, but his eyes were brighter than Philip had seen them. The next minute Laddie laid a hand on his shoulder: “You grand person,” he cried; “and you *can* speak French poetry. That last line is tremendous.

Le vieux moulin qui tourne et, las, qui tourne et meurt.”

Laddie's voice rose and fell harmoniously as he almost intoned the words. Then he said excitedly, “Isn't Verhaeren superb? He is the only poet who makes me feel that life really matters and when I read him I seem to want to go and pummel someone and shout ‘Wake up, wake up! look at the sunshine and the roaring stream. Let's run about the meadows naked and sing challenges to the birds—and——’ And there's more than that—he knows what women are and love.” The next moment he gave a little shrug and was once more rather languid, rather cynical: “How theatrical I am! So tiring. Let's have tea.”

Rather amazed at this outburst Philip sat in silence while his host got cups and a loaf and various plates of food from outside the door. In a short while they were busy eating toast and jam.

LADDIE

"There's no one else coming," said Laddie. "I hope you won't be awfully bored. But I hate crowds at a meal—at least I'm not the kind of host who can manage them. I always get agitated and rush about in circles like a hen, which means that stacks of crockery are broken and no one gets anything to eat. You were very severe with me last night at the Basilisks."

Philip laughed in duet. "I was absurd," he said, "absurd and pompous. It shan't happen again."

There was a short silence, then Philip looked at his companion.

"You know, Laddie," he began—then stopped and coloured a little—"I'm sorry—it slipped out——"

"Don't be ridiculous. Anyone who likes Verhaeren may call me any earthly thing he chooses. Go on."

"I wondered until just now whether you were always serious and pretending not to be, or whether you never were. But now I think I know."

"And your conclusion?"

"That you never are unless you can help it. And the reason is that you daren't let yourself be."

Laddie composedly flicked a crumb into the grate. "Perhaps that's true," he said quietly. "I hardly know myself. But I'm a rotten kind of creature really. Even if I raged my utmost

H Y S S O P

I doubt if it would frighten a mouse. Have another cup ? ”

However, the pause for cup-filling did not end the matter. Laddie, as he kicked the sugar-basin towards his guest, continued : “ There’s another reason—it’s a kind of reaction. Flippancy is the *béguinage* of the prematurely serious, and I was a Bede at fifteen. Solemn, priggish, too awfully righteous. When I think of the flappers I might have kissed at those half-and-half parties where all the grown-ups behave like children and all the children like grown-ups—it makes me squirm for the little donkey I was. Nowadays no flapper would tolerate me kissing her for a moment—that is, no flapper that I should want to.” He shot away at a tangent : “ That’s another difficulty—I am a voluptuary by inclination but a monk by result. Why ? Because I will not realise what I know perfectly well, that, as society is constituted, there can only once be real *abandon* without squalor—or an element of the disgusting. I mean an ideal marriage—which is a bit premature at present. And I am therefore driven back on to poetry and pictures as a refuge from my own intractability. In relations with art all the *mise en scène* comes from oneself. I furnish my palaces of pleasure according to my own tastes ; the houris that people them are at once shrinking and bold, mysterious and utterly revealing ; there is no disillusion because there is no element which is not, so to speak, in the game. And—— ”

“ I think,” said Philip suddenly, “ that there

is one more reason—I don't say this because I'm a thought-reader, but because I agree with you so largely that I am sure you share what I have always felt—an almost grim disinclination to add to the girl's burden. I have always had as much liberty as I wanted, and you can't live in a Latin country as long as I have and fail to run against 'adventures,' however young you are, but my experiments at 'rose flinging' have terminated voluntarily, because the whole affair is a fraud and because I couldn't escape a rather absurd realisation of the mockery of those girls' lives. And that pity I feel just as much for the girls we meet at dances—only, of course, in a less degree. It must be a damnable job spending one's youth in a sort of physical shop window. And the thing might be so splendid——”

“Verhaeren makes it so,” broke in Laddie. “His is the wind of the beauty of nakedness, and his conception of nakedness is rhythm and colour. That's why he beats Whitman, who is jerky and too meaty—although splendid, of course, in his way. It seems to me that modern verse is the renascence of nakedness after the petticoats of Tennyson and the drawers of the 'nineties. The English discovery⁷ of underclothes has meant rottenness and hypocrisy. They have gone from intimacy to intimacy, but each intimacy was by gaslight, with the blinds down and a smirk on the lips. Whitman and Browning heralded the physically and spiritually naked—and now Verhaeren comes to blend the two. He

H Y S S O P

is the final answer to those prurient mandarins who censor by subject-matter. The treatment is the art, and they cannot judge treatment. Verhaeren says things that Baudelaire, that even the Belgian Satanists never said. But he says them so that they are not weeds but flowers. And I believe it is because he has all the pity you spoke of. Baudelaire and the 'nineties, for all their idealisation of harlotry, were never anything but fundamentally contemptuous. The thing was a toy—a *sub rosa* game to be played a little more boldly for the purpose of shocking a class that never read the players' works. There is something sticky about it. Not so much about Verlaine; because he was a child, and when he was dirty he was shamelessly so; he enjoyed grubbing in the coal-box and comes, quite simply, to show you how he has smeared his face and his hands with coal-dust. But many of the others—Louys and Gilkin specially I think—you know what I mean. The note of pity begins with Blake, but not till Browning do you get it really strong. It's not pity for fallen women always—but pity for everything that has fallen short of the world's conventional sham; pity for lovers, for heretics, for patriots, for murderers even. And then Verhaeren comes and seems to link it all on to a tremendous sense of the cycle of nature and humanity. He always gives me the idea of regarding modern society as a huge joy-wheel, and men, having paid their sixpences, cling together in the attempt to stay

as long as they can on the treacherous disk of revolving life, thinking shame to themselves if they are thrown off, and considering all the thousands who never paid a sixpence to get in at all, as some inferior and outcast species. But those outsiders have their cleaner, simpler, nobler life—and such life Verhaeren describes in his ‘*Dialogues Rustiques*’ or in the turbulent orgies of ‘*Les Flamandes*.’”

“But do you think we are any nearer a rational conception of nakedness than we were twenty years ago?”

“Oh, certainly. Everything points to less restraint and pretence imposed from without. Militancy, the evolution of the general strike, all this new idea of education, Montessori methods, co-education, sex-teaching—everything. Restraint, just like taste in pictures or clothes, must come from inside and that can only come from freedom and complete understanding. No one is able to lay down a sense of proportion for me but myself. Women, the working-class, children—are demanding freedom and classification as normal beings. Fashion is tending to comfort and simplicity. Women wear less every day. Their bodies now appear almost their real shape. Top hats are going; soft ones coming in. Of course there will be small reactions, but the direction is all right. And I think we owe a lot of it to America.”

“To America?”

“Yes—but not altogether consciously. Over

H Y S S O P

there I imagine that they have created for themselves hypocrisies and shams even greater than ours. But they cannot help being more free and easy—and that is what England is becoming. I'd like to go to America and see just how things are. Their literature and their painting are, of course, virtually twaddle. There are a few fine exceptions, but very few. Musically, all the Americans I have met profess keen appreciation—and I don't doubt their sincerity. But they are artistically barren, because I think they are artistically over-conscious and immature. I remember a man, who dined at home once last vac and who had been in America several years, saying that they are naturally practical but deliberately artistic, while the French are naturally artistic and deliberately practical."

"And we?"

"Well. We are ashamed of all our good qualities—(How I generalise!—but you see the point?) Our literature and painting is blurted out—half apologetically. It is as if the English artist said, 'I would much rather be a good shot or a good rugger-player, but I've gone and written a stupid poem or painted a picture instead. I'm very sorry.' And the rest of us accept his apology good-humouredly enough, but don't look at his poem or his picture till sufficient time has elapsed for it to become, not the indiscretion, but the glory of a past generation. If ever America produces great art, she will deserve and give herself immediate credit

for it. We deserve no credit as a nation for ours, but only undying shame for our neglect of it."

"Have you ever been really in love?" asked Philip suddenly. Laddie had risen and crossed the room to one of his glass-fronted book-cases. For a moment he did not answer, but as he returned to the fire with a book in his hand he said:

"No. I want to be now, only I'm not good enough, so I shan't allow myself."

Philip looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"Oh—the same old thing," with a laugh, "I carry about a supply of pedestals and forget the ladder. So that when my deity is safely lodged on the top, I can't get up myself. Come in!"

The door opened and a large, heavy-featured but ruggedly good-looking young man came in.

"Hullo, Arthur!" Laddie's voice had immediately resumed its lazy impersonality.

"Make up a four at bridge after hall—Laddie?" said the new-comer. "George and a man from Trinity are playing."

"Thanks. I'd like to. Do you know Mr. Murray? Mr. Burkett—Mr. Murray." Then turning to Philip, "Here's rather a treasure I picked up in Paris last Easter—Presentation copy of the '*L'Après midi d'un Faune*' to Verlaine."

"By Jove," said Philip, taking the book, "that's splendid! I've never seen the actual first edition

H Y S S O P

before. I was quite pleased with Vanier's reprint which I got in London—but this rather puts its nose out of joint."

He sat turning over the pages of the slim volume, whilst Arthur Burkett, taking a cigarette, stood by the table fingering the scattered books and papers.

"You're a funny chap, Laddie," he said; "you read all this French stuff and then pretend you disapprove of having fun with those girls at Dorchester. Why not come out next Sunday with us? There's a little ripper there—a new one. She'll——"

"Thank you, Arthur," said Laddie shortly. "You must shear your own lambs. I've no talent for stock-farming." Burkett shrugged his shoulders and lounged towards the door:

"Eight-thirty—in my room." The door closed on him. There was silence, till Philip, closing his book, laid it on the table and glanced at Laddie, who was staring into the fire, his fingers absently twisting and untwisting a piece of string.

"Is he an illustration?" asked Philip suddenly. Laddie started. "A what? Oh—an illustration? Yes—I suppose he is." Then slowly, "He's the complete outsider."

"Then why play bridge with him?"

"Why on earth not? He plays an excellent game." He got up, returned the "*Après midi*" to its shelf and stretched expansively. "Let's go to Blackwell's."

Philip assented, and together they left the room, leaving the firelight flickering on the disorder of teacups and plates, on the gleaming side of the polished piano.

II

It seemed that Laddie's influence was the thing really needed to bring Philip out of his diffidence, out of the too placid acceptance of men and events which gave to many the impression that he was sluggish and merely imitative. Under the impulse of this new friendship he became at once livelier and more self-assertive. Trafford, who had watched him during his first year with some perplexity, noticed the change among the first. He remarked to Plarr one evening in the Senior Common Room after hall that Philip Murray seemed to have found a new interest in life.

"I have sometimes been rather worried at his lack of definiteness. The personality is there, I have always been convinced of that, but it seemed dormant. Recently he has been a great deal more cheerful and at times even violent. How does he work?"

"Very fairly on the whole," replied his tutor with his judicious preciseness. Then, glancing over his glasses at Trafford:

"He seems to have made friends with Macalister. . . ."

H Y S S O P

Trafford smiled with the nearest approach to contempt of which he was capable.

"I wonder for how long . . . ? Macallister is for ever needing new audiences. I wish he was not so foolish socially. A clever boy enough, I should say, if he could forget externals."

This remark was so typical of Trafford's theory of community-value in the undergraduate that Plarr, in his judgments more acute and in his belief in sociability less firm than the speaker, let the somewhat challenging assertion pass without comment. Being himself by choice a unit isolated, except by work, from his fellow-dons, he was unlikely to judge unfavourably an undergraduate's taste for a similar aloofness. Trafford, on the other hand, who sincerely deplored the mutual dislikes of the college cliques and who did so much himself to remove them, was quite naturally puzzled and a little irritated by the deliberate independence of such a character as Laddie. He knew the boy had numerous acquaintances, was popular as things go in Wallace. But he could not be fitted in to the general scheme. He was out of line on one point or another with every group to which he did partially and might, apparently, whole-heartedly belong. Accordingly Trafford distrusted him as a disruptive influence and was sorry that Philip had become his intimate. Which judgment shows that even the most practised and sympathetic observers of youth may be mistaken sometimes.

Ignorant of the preoccupations of the Senior Common Room on his account, Philip now set out in true earnest to discover the University. Perils and *détentes* were over. He had found his level and could absorb the multitude of ideas and hopes with which the air of Oxford is alive.

In college he assumed a comfortable position midway between living the life of the community and that of the recluse. His fondness for rugger, not that it was allied with dazzling efficiency, threw him in the way of men he would otherwise hardly have known by sight. His friendship for Jack Cartwright kept him alive at least to the existence of the river and its exploits, although he possessed to the full Laddie's abhorrence of the rowing enthusiast whose share in the sport is confined to the towing path. Laddie declined to play any games but tennis, which he played remarkably well. "An outdoor man," he would say, "merely means a man whose manners are too bad for the house."

"But then, Laddie, you ought, in consistency, to hate walking and detest the country."

"Not a bit. Don't you realise, old thing, that people only play games either from what they call the 'sporting instinct'—which means beating someone else at a rivalry that hasn't the least present or future importance—or because they are afraid of getting stout. The latter reason is admirable but fortunately doesn't affect me. My ancestors never stirred hand or foot in any other

HYSSOP

exercises than is involved in moving from a writing-table to a book-case, from a good dinner to a *nuît d'amour*, from a challenge to the duelling ground and so on, but they all died as lean as scarecrows. As for the competitive value of games I get that in other ways, and ways in which I stand some reasonable chance of winning. A love of the country, on the other hand, has nothing to do with communal effort or competition. It is pure individualism, the earth smells perfect and one gets enormously hungry—all of which three are very noble and laudable conceptions."

Fine days in autumn and winter used often to see Laddie far away in the Cotswolds, or ranging Abingdon woods, sometimes alone, but more often in company with a certain Douglas Field of Magdalen, and a tall slashy man like a Beardsley curve, whom he always called Pumblechook and who hailed from B.N.C.

Field was a frail, girlish-looking boy, with a very fair skin and odd flail-like legs that never seemed quite controllable. He was a Roman Catholic, collected Missals and adored every manifestation of Gothic. Destined, by a rare coincidence of taste and parent, to be an architect he guided his friends to the churches and old houses of the neighbourhood with skill and intelligence. He had been infected by Laddie with an adoration of nakedness and spent many hours trying to reconcile his love of the stiff vestments of the traditional Virgin with his friend's and his own enthusiasm for the beauty of naked women.

He painted a little—vilely according to Laddie, whose criticism never caused the slightest offence to the artist—and had even been convicted of a secret admiration for Gustave Moreau, which earned him much sarcasm.

“Pumblechook” (why he had been so christened was never explained by Laddie. The best he could do was the statement that he had just read “Great Expectations” when he first met the man, and had loved the name as much as its recipient hated it) was by nature contrary. He argued about everything even when really in complete agreement with the speaker. He was in truth as devout an admirer of Gothic as Field himself, but never a walk passed without a heated argument on the merits of church design in which Field defended Early English, Laddie Norman, and Pumblechook either Byzantine or Classical or the new railway station at Leipzig as the fancy took him or the calls of disputation demanded.

Pumblechook was very short-sighted, but refused to wear any kind of glasses. He read late Latin authors as easily as the ordinary man reads a modern novel, dabbled in witchcraft and was always bankrupt. As he walked he would slash with his stick at dandelions or stones, wave his arms and repeat Villon at the top of his voice. He condemned all modern art as neurotic self-advertisement, called Verhaeren a “Walloon,” the deadliest insult in his vocabulary, and maintained that Barrès and Déroulède represented

H Y S S O P

the whole of recent French effort in fiction and poetry. No one ever knew exactly what his convictions were on any subject but Gothic, because he was unwilling to carry his argumentativeness into the decoration of his rooms and they spoke for themselves. He was of Laddie's year, had got a brilliant first in Mods. and was equally sure for Greats. His views for the future were brief but violent.

"I shall buy an absurd little castle in the Apennines and wander about the country thieving and wenching till I am hung or until all my money is spent, whichever comes soonest. If the latter I shall save exactly enough to buy a third-class ticket to Amiens, climb to the topmost pinnaele of the cathedral and there sit, chanting the Ballad of Dead Ladies until I die of starvation."

"My affection for Douglas bids me hope you have a Gothic skeleton," said Laddie. "One of those nasty Darwinian designs would spoil the whole façade."

"You are being a donkey, my dear Laddie. I have no skeleton at all. I shall decompose charmingly and poison all the sparrows."

Philip's habit of playing games made him an infrequent participant in these walks, but he often encountered Laddie's companions at tea in their common acquaintance's room, and was soon friendly with them.

On other days he would talk to Dallas Merriek about nothing in particular from four-thirty

to dinner-time, or play bridge with Jack Cartwright and some of his friends. His work claimed an adequate but not overwhelming attention. He was not of the stuff of which firsts are generally made, being too equable for brilliance and too keenly alive to plod. But he was good friends with Plarr and counted on his Christmas vacation and the free part of the following term to fit him for as notable a performance in Mods. as he had the ambition to achieve.

One wet afternoon he went to seek out Trafford and found John Franklin, and two other men he knew by sight and reputation but not personally, already in possession.

Both were New College men. Vardon was swarthy and aggressive. He wrote amazingly good parodies, made vastly amusing political speeches and told everyone all about all of them. He affected ruthless "arrivisme," wore a tortoiseshell monocle and straps under his boots and collected relics of the Italian War of Liberation. His politics were not those of Mazzini so much as of Cavour, whom he considered "at least achieved something." He hated kings because they were above the law, and to be above the law was to him, as the future Lord Chief Justice, as wicked as it is to be a Christian Scientist in the eyes of the average doctor. Politicians, except in so far as they were often lawyers, he despised for never saying what they meant, and still more for never making others say what they did not. He had the

HYSSOP

inevitable unpopularity of the forceful man, but his enemies were almost entirely among those he had outdistanced or those who knew him only by sight or reputation. Both these groups he ignored. Among his intimates he was known for a generous and rather simple-minded friend, with a mask of ferocious cynicism. They rallied him on his Union activities, for the Union was naturally enough his principal theatre of activity, and affected, in his presence, an irritating ignorance of its politics. It was on the second aspect of his Varsity career that they shared his hopes and undertakings. Vardon was an amateur actor, who sustained indiscriminately classical or modern, poetical or prose, tuneless or musical parts in whatever company or on whatever stage the occasion offered. How he ever found time to do all he did and yet keep well abreast of his school's work, no one could imagine. A normal term's activity for him would include the regular O.U.D.S. performance (when there was one), the stage managing and playing of a modern farce in Magdalen, the ceaseless toil of a Union election campaign, the sub-editorship of one of the Varsity magazines, as well as the work required by his tutor and his own ambitions. He was just at the beginning of his third year—a contemporary, that is, of Laddie's and a year junior to Franklin, with whom he had been at school.

His fellow-collegian Tamworth was of a profound but slightly foggy intensity. He had a

smooth round face with large tortoiseshell spectacles behind which unsmiling and sleepy eyes roved from face to face. He hardly ever spoke and only laughed when no one expected he would, in a high rockety cough which ceased its noise as suddenly as it had been begun. He read immense quantities of philosophy in a ruminative manner and with little apparent result, except a tendency to use long words and make puns. Tradition said he had once been so drunk that he had toasted the memory of Mrs. Henry Wood and actually dictated and posted an order for a complete set of the available editions of her works which arrived and caused him weeks of hard and trying effort before they were disposed of. When not reading philosophy he would contemplate Ibsen's plays gloomily in Norwegian (a language of which he was entirely ignorant) or play on a piano with two fingers the only tunes he knew, which were "All the Little Pansy Faces" and "Abide with me." He kept a large yellow tomcat in his rooms, who shared his sombre disposition and was suspected of being a familiar spirit. Unkind people said he was always about with Vardon because he made such a good audience and it has never been found out whether he spoke at all out of doors as his voice was so low that only in the quietest room was it audible.

Trips, when Philip entered his room, was huddled in his favourite attitude on the fire-seat. Vardon, almost too beautifully dressed,

HYSSOP

sat smartly in a not excessively deep arm-chair and smoked a cigarette in a holder nearly a foot long. Tamworth, his pipe, as usual not only unlighted but unfilled, in his mouth, lay full length on the sofa staring darkly at whoever spoke. John Franklin was meandering about the room picking up books and laying them down again, birdlike as ever.

Vardon, who hoped and intended to get the Junior Treasurership this term, was discussing Union election prospects. He said, "How do you do?" firmly when introduced to Philip, and returned without a pause to his daring capture of five freshers with votes from a rival in Univ. by adding to the breakfast prospects a complicated dish that only New College could produce. The revised menu so outshone that offered by the Univ. candidate that the constituents, as one mouth, rallied to Vardon and his cause, only leaving the table at ten-thirty because there was no more marmalade.

"What," asked Tamworth suddenly, "is the psychological connection between the stomach and the political opinion?"

No one volunteering an answer he relapsed into silence and pulled his front hair with two fingers.

"Here's a man with a vote," said Franklin to Vardon, designating Philip. "Better tackle him."

Vardon, whose brutal methods were always applied rather in narrative than fact, said

rather charmingly to Philip, "Will you vote for me?"

"What for?" asked Philip.

"Union—J.T.—you know—election on Wednesday——"

"I haven't thought about it," said Philip reflectively. "Are you the best man?"

"Ever so much," said Vardon. "Almost the only man. The others are undergraduates."

"Count me enrolled," returned Philip. "I never could bear the brutes."

Trips shook himself like a dog.

"Well, Philip," he said mildly, "how's everything?" (It was characteristic of Trips to greet his friends on every occasion as if he hadn't seen them for weeks.)

"I'm depressed by the approach of Mods."

"Are you going on a reading party in the Christmas vac.?"

"I may go with Jack for a bit but it depends on my mamma. She gets bored all alone at Chiswick and can't go abroad this winter partly because she's broke and partly because I won't."

"Vardon, when did the power of the matriarchate decline to allow defiance of the parent's will by the child?" Tamworth asked this question without moving even his lips.

"Shut up, Tam," said Franklin. "It's too early in the day to acquire knowledge."

The minute comedian employed by Wallace to distribute muffins shot into the room at this

H Y S S O P

point, crashed four covered plates into the ashes on the hearth and shot out again, as though his action was purely decorative and had no relation to facts. Trips busied himself with tea-making. Tamworth jerked himself off the sofa in two moves and strode with set face into Trip's bedroom to wash his hands, his place being immediately taken by Franklin. Philip handed round the food from a kneeling position on the hearthrug. Vardon, to no one in particular, related an anecdote of Rome in which he routed three curiosity dealers by the persistent use of the words "Divide, Divide!" and secured relics of the hero of Italian unity at a rate considerably below cost price.

When it was over, Trips was free enough from host's duties to remember similar adventures in Constantinople. The collecting instinct seemed to have captured conversation, till Tamworth gave it a fatal check by quoting Dr. von Grumpenhäusen's epigram (in seventy-three words, not counting compounds, and full stops) on the with-reason-unconnected and with-private possession-lust-as-against-communal-feeling-allied degeneracy of the collecting-mind. Tea over, and a timid pupil of Trip's putting in an appearance, the four guests departed together.

In the quad they met Laddie, walking very fast and waving his arms.

"Good Lord," he shouted, as they approached, "it's vile, it's really awful. What a damned nation we are."

"Who is that terrible-looking man with the red nose and crumbs on his waistcoat?"—and John Franklin shrank behind Vardon.

"What in the world's the matter?" asked Philip.

"Matter!" spluttered Laddie indignantly, "*that's* the matter," and he threw a blue-bound book at a lilac bush. "Such a chance missed, such a chance. And now we're worse off than ever."

"Someone's promised to take him to the pantomime and cancelled it." Vardon was soothing. "He must have some aconite."

The patient had now been steered into Franklin's room as the nearest haven and was urged to explain himself.

"Why, the hero of the new type of conventional English novel, of course," he said petulantly. "We have laboriously made an end of the strong, silent prig, who was moral because he hadn't the wit to be otherwise, and in his place we have merely got the fast, clean-limbed hypocrite, with his manly joys and wild oats and scrupulous ordinariness."

"He sounds a most complicated and interesting creature," remarked Vardon, with his emphatic sneer, "a kind of agricultural Louis Quinze."

Tamworth muttered something inaudible, screwed up his nose and gloomed at the company. No one took any notice.

"What book was it that caused this regrettable outburst of feeling?" enquired Franklin.

HYSSOP

"Some foul novel—I forget the name. But there's a damnable uncle in it who is the worldly Dr. Barlow that the library public demand nowadays, who gives his nephew apparently genial but really utterly cynical advice about getting in and out of 'peccadilloes,' as he pleases to call them. Of course, they're all fearfully rich, and the girls are 'open-air' maidens and 'good-fellows' and that kind of piffle, only they always, I notice, blush and tremble at the lord of creation and think themselves lucky to get a conceited, squalid ass as a husband because they aren't allowed to know any better."

"Do I understand," said Vardon sharply, "that the 'maidens' in your rather confused précis of this admirable work (and you *said* them plural however much you may deny it) *all* marry the nephew?"

"Sounds more like Piccadilly than Peccadillo," whispered Tamworth, and hiccuped with laughter, until suppressed.

"No! there are rows of maidens and rows of young men, all exactly alike and all sentimental geese and consummate young bounders. Aren't I trying to explain to you," went on Laddie, getting up and pulling a pipe out of his pocket with an impatient tug, "that the whole philosophy of the 'keep-it-dark-from-the-girl' school is merely a gigantic conspiracy to bolster up an intolerable tyranny of male self-indulgence and hypocrisy, that has already ruined half the national physique without allowing the other

half to be ruined too, so that a new type might be evolved? It's all part of the same——"

"Votes for Women is *not* a remedy," interrupted Vardon fiercely. "As I said in my speech at the Union last week to give votes to women would be like giving them trousers. They would be very uncomfortable and not look nearly so nice."

"I'm weary of telling you the vote is merely a symbol, a translation into terms comprehensible to the dunderheaded fools who make up the English public. Here you have a perfectly flagrant case of injustice—you profess to care for justice, Vardon——"

"Not a bit," snapped Vardon. "I care for law."

"Joke," said Laddie savagely and shot off once more: "Can't you imagine old Uncle Worldly's horror if one of the 'pure girls,' as the lousy old hypocrite dares to call them, turned out to be playing the same game of hush-it-up as precious Master nephew? 'Out my house, wanton!' that would be his line. May the gods grant that whatever past I may have in the future shall play its part in exploding the rotten and typically puritanical theory that Uncles stand for."

He stamped round the room, while his audience grinned quietly at so fine an exhibition of Laddie on his hobby-horse. In a moment he was in full swing again:

"Why, the French method is better than

H Y S S O P

ours. At least they are frank about keeping young girls in conventual retirement until their marriage. At least they don't pretend to teach them the world and its way! But here, in this miserable, canting country we laud ourselves to the skies for the freedom we give our girls, for the joyous companionship of the sexes—and then we set aside a whole class to give the logical sequence of companionship, a class consisting of the women we treat as dogs and the men we treat as Bayards, and flatter the 'nice' girls into thinking they marry people like themselves. But the farce can't go on. The new lot of women aren't going to be taken in by that sort of twaddle. They'll be giving our cheerful young bloods something to think about."

"They'll always be wearing their new clothes and boots for one thing," said Franklin.

"Oh, John, don't make dismal old jokes about suffragettes. You know perfectly well you agree with me, only you daren't say so because you don't want to have to give up beer and Catullus. You needn't be afraid. The movement *must not* lead to Puritanism. Better Catullus all round, yes, and the Marquis de Sade, than elastic-sided boots and Purity Crusades."

"In the Doll's House——" began Tamworth darkly.

"The pretty gentleman has read it, Tam," said Vardon. "Laddie, you're superb. You ought to be Warden of Toynbee. Your social ideas are exactly those of the criminal classes.

You could make your institution a propagandist centre. At present they tell me its influence is entirely the other way."

Laddie, still rather ruffled, was filling the pipe he had been brandishing.

"I shan't stay in this rotten room any longer. I'm bored with my curtains. Come and advise me how to change them."

In his outraged wake they followed him down and out across the quad. As they went Philip rescued from the lilac bush into which it had been hurled, bruised but dignified, a blue-bound novel.

III

The next stage in the university career of Philip Murray comprised the Christmas vacation, the Lent Term and the following Easter vacation of this his second year. For far the greater part of these months he was either in the shadow of or directly in the midst of Mods., and, though as a formative influence the work done at college is no doubt of great importance, it necessarily cuts off the worker from contact with his fellows and so destroys the chronicler's chief duty, that of portraying his hero as member of a society. But though absorbed, Philip was, between the bars of his prison, able to summarise his impressions of the college life even better perhaps than when he was forming an eager part of one or other of its groups.

H Y S S O P

The dons, who except for Plarr and Trips had been to him first objects of veneration and then of indifference, now assumed the form of definite individualities. The Master, of course, was an institution, something above criticism like the college architecture or Homer. The tutors other than Greats men Philip saw largely through the eyes of his friends who studied under them. There was Hamley the mathematician, who was so aggressively patriotic that it was hard to believe he was a native Briton. Hamley wrote pseudo-comic arithmetic and algebra textbooks and, accordingly to tradition, wore red, white and blue pyjamas and sang "Rule, Britannia" in his sleep. He was small and drab-coloured, with a seedy mid-Victorian beard and hunched shoulders. He looked like a frontispiece portrait of some famous man in youth. There was Gambier, a distinguished historical scholar and without a rival on the pamphleteers of the Civil War, but an unpopular and unwilling tutor. His methods of teaching were a blend of savagery and sarcasm which together produced a peculiarly irritating brand of incompetence. Only the patent fact that he hated his pupils as much as they hated him kept up a mutual semblance of peace.

Then there was Dodsworth. Dodsworth was very young, had in fact only recently ceased to be an undergraduate in the college of which he was now fellow. He was pleasant, rather athletic, and very nervous in the hated office of Junior Dean which had been thrust upon him as one

unable to refuse. He passed his life in dread of being called upon to quell a riot of Oxford aristocrats, and in helping to coach at rowing.

The Rev. Charles Widgeott, the college chaplain, was a retiring unobtrusive little man, who did some obscure theological teaching, and made persevering, if somewhat *plaintif* attacks on the traditional scepticism of the Wallace undergraduate. He seemed rather ashamed of God, and, in his efforts to explain the value of faith to such individuals as allowed themselves to be approached, always adopted a knowing and almost roguish tone, as of one who realised that the Deity was not quite up to Wallace standards, but that he hoped before long to get matters reformed. This apparent lack of conviction in his cause only gave scope for malicious gossip without increasing the influence either of the message or of him who gave it.

There were other classical dons, there was Trafford and his eighteenth-century literature, there were scientists, even a modern language lecturer. They formed no crust to the college pie but appeared suddenly here and there in its mass, like the cloves among the fruit. Around, above, and below them were the undergraduates in their various formations. Philip enumerated them to himself. There were the social bloods who wore dark blue jerseys and bedroom slippers and looked like fishermen who had taken to drink. They made too much noise on some

H Y S S O P

occasions and too little on others ; Philip noticed that their society was not for anti-Semites. Kindred to these but less cosmopolitan were the political, athletic or socially gifted few who were on dance-committees and stood for good form. Jack Cartwright was already on his way to this society. They never smoked gold-tipped cigarettes, nor wore white waistcoats with dinner-jackets, nor read newspapers other than "The Times" or the "Morning Post." They were sometimes drunken and noisy, sometimes condescendingly genial, seldom very intelligent. All were anti-suffragists and solid on the Licensing problem. None ever went to church, but none were in favour of disestablishment. To all of them a "lady" was somehow different from a "woman."

The "Bunch" (whom Philip had already encountered), the scientists (who hurried in and out of cellars and went to meetings of societies no one had ever heard of), the purposely disreputable (who parodied the Trinity and seldom washed), the Scotchmen (who had black chins and played better bridge than one would have expected), and finally the obscure group known as the Towsers (who all lived on one staircase and had difficulties with their diphthongs), made up the college which lay outside that section to which Philip himself belonged and naturally considered the best. It was a large, formless section and certainly a clever one. It contained philosophical geniuses like John Franklin,

extremists like Laddie, and ordinary people like himself. Altogether college was great fun and Mods. a bore. And he bent over his books again.

Mods. passed and he scored a third. Plarr said he ought to have done better, but without much conviction. In his relief at being free once more Philip sold all his classical texts and had to buy them gradually back again for Greats. The moment term ended he went to Paris with Laddie.

The painting and writing world was in the first throes of Cubism. Violence was in the air. Vers-libre carried everything before it. The friends led a life of endless disputation in cafés of an evening, of endless wandering during the day. From their little hotel in the quartier they ranged the city, ransacked the bookshops, haunted the galleries. They made hundreds of acquaintances and a few friends. At the d'Harcourt, at the Lilas, they fought out again and again the battle of Gauguin and Cézanne. Night after night they sat in one or other of the cafés of the Boul. Mich. In the effervescent company of that crowd of painters and their models, poets and their mistresses, whose life is the secret dream of every undergraduate, they argued, asserted, rhapsodised, till the marble tables were scrawled black with charcoal and the faces of the company, flushed with absinthe, shone scarlet in the gaslight. Theatres, first editions, drawings,

H Y S S O P

and revellings produced in time a monetary crisis that necessitated instant flight. For the last week of the vacation Laddie and Philip repaired to their respective homes and economised.

Philip, for all his residence abroad, was practically new to Paris. His father had hated it as the home of subversive theory, and his son's artistic training had been scrupulously free from the revolutionary ideas that now buzzed in his head. He adopted the vivid colourings and unkempt appearance of the quartier. His mother was quietly amused, but said little beyond expressing an emphatic dislike of such specimens of the new art her son had brought back with him. She noted with interest that the human side of Bohemian life had not much affected him. He identified his late companions exclusively by their ideas and methods. Their habits of life were of secondary importance. He went up to Oxford threatening to tear the carpet up in his room and paint the walls in black and orange stripes. Mrs. Murray smilingly suggested new curtains as a birthday present. The offer was greeted with enthusiasm.

At Paddington Philip fell in with several acquaintances who were offensive about his tie and said his hair was too long. These insults gratified him vastly. He gave them highly coloured pictures of the vice and excitement of life in Paris all the way up to Oxford and arrived in college feeling that now indeed he was a man.

Laddie had not yet come up, and Philip went to bed with a great pity in his heart for the narrow and stunted lives of those about him. The drawings strewn on the table gave the scout a severe shock the next morning, among the effects of which he included the absence of mind that allowed him to put the kettle on the fire without any water in it and so burn a hole in the bottom. At any rate it was not he who paid for a new one.

IV

Philip regarded his sitting-room with disfavour. Its transformation had been delayed for lack of funds. Term was nearly half over. There wasn't really room for the baby grand. Were waltzes worth it? It crowded up the corner dreadfully. Its only justification was its shiny dark surface from which Chevrillon's gaudy painted sacking could shout its daring discords at the visiting world. He decided to shunt it. Then he was bored with "Battersea Bridge." Peacock blues and greens seemed stupidly *démodés* now. They suggested his first year, or the early 'nineties, or some such absurd and distant epoch. Stroski hadn't a chance next Whistler; he was smothered, choked with the evanescence of that twilight vision. It was like drinking beer out of Ruskin ware; spoilt the taste of the beer entirely. Whistler must go. Ferguson should buy him for twenty-

H Y S S O P

five bob; perhaps more. Ferguson might be good for the Redon lithograph as well, tiresome symbolic thing taking up a good place which would be infinitely better devoted to the Yellow Christ even if it was only a photograph. In an amused side vista he saw Drouet, stout and suave, fencing his enquiries in the grey carpeted gallery among the Girieuds and the Sérusiers. "The Yellow Christ?—ah, yes—it was so long ago that he had seen it. It *might* be in America now. Who could tell?" and so on. Philip had bought a photograph, aired his views on the inflated boom in Meunier to the discredit of dealers in general, and left the shop with such dignity as he could muster. Undoubtedly The Yellow Christ should replace Redon, and Ferguson's rubber-heeled doubloons (or was it potted meat?) should go to the mounting and framing of some of the café-scribblings he had brought back from that epoch-making journey.

He turned his attention to the book-cases, and was debating where room for another could be found when Laddie came in. He looked pre-occupied and held a scribbling block in his hand and a pencil in his mouth.

"I say," he began abstractedly, removing the pencil and scratching his head with it, "do you know anyone in Wadham?"

"Yes—you turn to the left, past Blackwell's, and then go towards Longwall, and then as if you were going to New College—no that's Hertford—you turn to the left. . . ."

"I don't in the least want to know how to *get* there, my dear Phil. Peters will tell me that. I asked whether you *knew* anyone there?"

"Why, on earth?"

"I want a secretary."

"If the screw was sufficient, *I* could perhaps find time. . . . Letters to creditors is it?—and so on?"

"Make a great effort and let me finish what I was going to say. The 'Sepoys' are now equipped with rules, president, vice-president, and intelligence—but they have no secretary. I am trying to find one."

"But why Wadham?"

"Because, dear old thing, all secretaries of Varsity Clubs are at Wadham—just as all presidents are at Wallace. The Union is the only exception, and there both presidents and secretaries are at Wallace, at least they were till Vardon went to the wrong college. I repeat, do you know anyone at Wadham?"

Philip pondered. "I fear not," he said, "but I should like to immensely. Is the language a difficult one?"

"Very like English, I believe, only the words are longer. 'Commence' instead of 'begin'—and that sort of thing."

"I see. Let us then at once proceed in search of a secretary."

Lighting pipes they descended the stairs and passed across the sunny space of the quad. Summer was setting in with genial mildness. It

HYSSOP

being about eleven-thirty, only a few men were about, mostly those who were either too young to know the meaning of work or too old to remember it. Here and there a happy being, emancipated, like Philip, by the over-passing of Honour Mods., breathed the spring air with nostrils agape with virtue. From the lecture-room near the porch the nasal periods of Mr. Hamley snarled and billowed through the leaded panes. The Broad was a serenity of sunlight. They lingered a moment at Blackwell's window, and passed on eliminating routes as they went. Opposite the Clarendon Buildings Laddie remembered that it was Wadham Garden which had had that lovely big tree in the middle.

"What an ass I am. I've been there hundreds of times."

They passed between the trim grass enclosures and entered the porter's lodge.

"Could you tell me, please," began Philip to the grey-haired porter, "who are the literary set in Wadham?"

The porter absorbed his interlocutor's long hair and vivid tie, registered an almost simultaneous impression of Laddie's perfect tweeds and shantung shirt and opined:

"You'll be wantin' either Mr. 'Odges or Mr. Freemantle, sir. Second stair hon the right—two pair hup. You'll find the servant, maybe, there now."

Philip thanked him and followed Laddie across the quad. They climbed two flights of stairs and

stood on a top landing faced by two open doors bearing the names "Hodges" and "Freemantle."

"Both out," said Laddie. "It's nearly twelve. Lectures probably. We'll take the first who comes."

"But suppose they come together? You'll have to make both of them Sepoys, and then I shall resign and the society will either decay into Futurism or admire Alfred Noyes."

"Tales of a Mermaid Wadham," murmured Laddie—and walked into Freemantle's room. It was pleasant and sunny and refreshingly undecorated. Laddie walked to the book-case while Philip glanced at the walls.

"Milton and Gilbert Murray's translations and Mrs. Humphry Ward," said Laddie.

"Watts and Turner and—oh the rascal—Greiffenhagen's 'Cuddling the Shepherdess,'" echoed Philip.

"Let's try Hodges."

They crossed the landing and entered a very similar room to the one just left, except that the general effect was more flowery and less dull maroon in tone. Over the chimney-piece was a large oval mirror; two siphons stood on the side-table; "Punch," "The English Review," and the "Isis" adorned the window-seat. Round the looking-glass were stuck cards of societies and meetings.

"He belongs to the 'Plato,'" said Philip. "One of our little group of philosophers that you poor

HYSSOP

historians cannot hope to emulate. I plump for Hodges. I wonder if I've ever seen him at the Plato. No one told me there was a member who was at Wadham. So secretive. I wonder——"

A step at the door arrested him. They turned and found themselves regarded with nervous surprise by a small spectacled man in a leather-buttoned coat and grey flannel trousers, with a scholar's gown drooping from his shoulders and a notebook in his hand. He made interrogative noises.

Laddie stepped forward.

"Are you Hodges? Please forgive this invasion, but I wanted to know whether you would do us the honour of being secretary to the Sepoys."

"Thank you very much," said the stranger squeakily. "I'm sure I should be very pleased. But I'm Crampton. I came up to see if Hodges was in. Who are the Sepoys?"

Laddie flickered a glance at Philip.

"The Sepoys are a Varsity club which has just come into being, with the idea of convincing every member by the brilliance and wit of every other member that he has the misfortune to be at the dullest college in Oxford. Such an aim demands wide representation and therefore . . ."

He saw the danger and paused—Philip stepped into the breach.

"And therefore Macallister and I, being the dullest members, have been deputed to find

representatives from Wadham, New College and Magdalen, whose rebuffs will fall unheeded on our obtuseness."

Crampton seemed slightly bewildered and gazed at the siphons for inspiration. Loud cries on the stairs interrupted his reverie. In a moment a large individual, with his mouth full of cake, burst into the room.

"What the hell . . . ?" he began—and stared about him. There was a pause. Crampton grinned and said, "Oh, Hodges——"

"Every apology is owing to Mr. Hodges," said Laddie sweetly. "My friend and I were told Mr. Crampton was up here, and, as we were looking for him particularly, we took the liberty of coming into your room. I'm really very sorry. You must think us squatters or something. But now that Crampton has kindly consented to be our secretary—secretary of the Sepoys that is, a new club—we won't be a bore any longer." Turning to Crampton, "There is a preliminary meeting in my rooms at Wallace on Tuesday at 8.30. You'll come, of course—and assume reins of office on the spot. Someone is reading a paper on something—I forget who"—he turned towards Philip—"oh, it's you—yes, of course, Murray's reading a paper. But you needn't listen. Come, Phil. Once more apologies" (this to Hodges), and Laddie floated away, in loquacious dignity with Philip in his wake, leaving Hodges and Crampton, the one too angry, the other too mystified to utter a word to stop him.

H Y S S O P

Philip broke the silence at the corner of the Broad.

"I wonder who and what Crampton is. He may be conchologist or even a rowing man. Your methods are adorable, but I'm bound to say risky. Also I know nearly as little as Crampton about the Sepoys. Why are they called Sepoys and am I one?"

"I suppose you'll have to be. You told Crampton so. The Sepoys are just any old bunch of men. We shall make a society the very image of every preceding one, even down to the detail of its own conviction of utter novelty. They are called Sepoys because, when I invented them, I had just been to a lecture on Hobbes, and I could not call them 'Leviathans,' because I don't believe there ever was more than one. Anyhow he always came my way in the singular. . . . And Sepoys seemed the only other name there was."

"So it is, of course. But who are they?"

"Vardon, Clewer of Trinity, Douglas Field, Tamworth, someone else at the House whose name I can't remember but who is fearfully elegant and rather equine, Pumblechook, Crampton, of course—oh—and one or two more."

"One final point: how the devil am I reading a paper on Tuesday when I never heard anything about it till five minutes ago?"

"Don't be difficult, Phil. You needn't read one at all if you don't want to. Crampton won't mind."

At the porch they were met by six-feet three of Webber, and a bicycle.

"Hallo, you men. Seen Jim Tharmsen anywhere?"

They hadn't.

"Wal I'll get along down to the 'thletic track. He'll be there, n'doubt, doin' the sprintin' reckud. See yer läturr."

He rode away. Inside the porch Bruce Dudley-Watson was polishing his monocle over the notices.

When he saw Laddie his smooth pink face brightened perceptibly.

"Just the man I wanted. Did old fuzzy-face give me an essay for this evening?"

"I think," replied Laddie. "Yes—on the Lancastrian Constitutional Experiment, wasn't it?"

"Lord!" ejaculated his questioner, "I must bestir myself, I really must. The words sound terribly long and difficult. Where can I find anything about it?"

"My dear Trixie, I sit at your feet. We are panting for this evening, so that we may know. At present I am too puffed-up by my experiences of the morning to think about history. Phil and I are in the fast set at Wadham."

"By Jove, that's tremendous!" The monocle was screwed into place. "You look a bit frayed, both of you. Been making the money fly I dare say; cigarettes and bubbly and all that. Well, well—but I must really bestir myself.

HYSSOP

Constitutional Experiment was it? Awful, awful——” he minced away muttering to himself. Laddie and Philip went in pursuit of lunch.

Dinner was verging on the joint stage that night when Philip saw Laddie, Dudley-Watson, and Parke (an obscure fellow-historian) hurrying up the hall, still carrying their notebooks from the tutor-hour just over. Laddie and Trixie clambered into vacant places opposite him and regarded their soup with some disfavour.

“Frigid, quite frigid,” sighed Trixie; “the ice forms visibly. The atmosphere is familiar enough. Damn it, Laddie, was the old geeser fearfully fed with me?” Laddie laughed aloud and turned to Philip.

“Oh, Phil, it was a perfect scream. Gamby was a bit touched with pink-eye when we came in, and started off with suspicious politeness to the minute:

“‘Mr. Waterson is it not? Yes, Mr. Waterson, and what have you to instruct us about this evening?’ Trixie began a long rigmarole——”

“Not a bit—I merely spat out a lot of bunkum about my interest in the previous subject having led me on to further what-you-call-it, to the detriment—damn good, ‘detriment,’ what?—of this bally old Experiment.”

“The Experiment—perfect, you know”—Laddie took up the narrative. “‘And *which* Experiment, Mr. Waterson?’ asks Gamby. Of

course Trix hadn't the foggiest and repeated '*which* experiment, Mr. Gambier?' in a pained voice, till Gamby turned to Parke and asked him if he could 'enlighten our friend Waterson.' Parke, like the worm he is—"Fool," whispered Trixie fiercely, "the blighter's only about two inches off"—Parke," repeated Laddie in a whisper—"slimed something priggish about the Lancastrians, etc., and old Gamby turned his fishy eyes on Trixie and waited for him to speak. In the meantime I'd managed to bring on to Trixie's knee what I thought were some notes of mine on the subject, and Trixie, thus fortified, beamed blandly on Gamby and explained that though he had not been able to throw his notes on the subject into essay form he had mastered the facts and would expound them, if Mr. Gambier did not object, verbally."

"I thought I'd got the old swine," grinned Trixie, his sleepy-looking eye roving gloomily over the potato dish. "I thought it reely was my fish this time. 'Don't you scratch before you begin to itch,' I said to myself. 'God's in his what-you-call and all that sort of thing.' And I heaved out the notes as lifelike as anything and cast a cursory glance over them. Figure to yourself, my dear old man"—here he put up his monocle and waved a meat-crowned fork at Philip—"figure to yourself little Sidney's horror when he discovered that damned fool Laddie had given him an analysis of Mortmain. Of Mortmain, mark you. Might as well have been Three Weeks.

HYSSOP

I groaned, I literally groaned in spirit as the Psalmist has it."

"I got giggles of course," put in Laddie. "Old Gamby gave it quite a minute before he spoke. Trixie got as red as Keble and stuttered and coughed and Parke grinned self-complacently, and at last Gamby said icily that he 'presumed Mr. Waterson would no longer conceal the long obvious fact that he had done no work whatever, and would even drop his pretended paternity to Mr. Macallister's notes.'"

"Paternity," chuckled Trixie; "oh, lor!"

"Then he cursed us up and down for twenty minutes and gave us both essays for next time and turned to Parke for his, which was, of course, fearfully long and deadly dull and quite correct."

Philip having by now finished, rose to go out. "Poor old things," he said. "So long—you'll fine me downstairs getting some coffee."

The Sepoys assembled in a very preliminary mood indeed on the appointed evening in Laddie's room. Philip refused to read a paper and the members discussed general policy. They decided nothing except that the Summer Term was a rotten one for societies and that they would hold their first meeting next year. Vardon suggested it should take the form of a dramatic performance, and the idea triumphed, despite Crampton's established belief that only where papers were to be read could two or three undergraduates gathered together be called a society

at all. Vardon, as he had intended, was put in charge of rehearsals and his large New College room was requisitioned as theatre. He insisted that the current term should be devoted to preparation and early rehearsals so that the performance itself might not interfere unduly with the work of his and his contemporaries' schools year. The Sepoys dispersed at a late hour, having consumed two boxes of Carlsbad plums, nearly a hundred cigarettes and innumerable jugs and bottles of cider cup, lemonade and beer. It was understood that the entertainment was to be musical. Laddie undertook the duties of orchestra.

When the last member had departed Laddie threw himself on to the sofa and stretched noisily.

"Terrible lot of men have been in here. Why on earth did I start the foul society! Crampton's a dream. His trousers were dreadfully tight though. When he swelled with indignation at our conception of a club, I feared the worst."

After a pause :

"You'll come and see me in the Long, won't you, Phil? The Reverend's a dear, you'll love him. And brother Bob is amusing if he's in form. I'll arrange for him to be at home when you come, write to the War Office or Vickers Maxim or whoever it is gives the subbest possible lieutenants leave."

"I'd love to, Laddie. It ought to be July I think, as I'm booked for August and my mother

H Y S S O P

never fails to go to Italy in September and will take me to look after the luggage if she can't get anyone else." He looked at his watch. "It's fatiguing work being a Sepoy. I shall go to bed. Good night."

Chapter Four

GO TH I C

I

IT is a short journey from London to Stansfield St. Mary, and Philip sat in his corner and watched the cavernous cliffs of squalid houses change to interminable districts of red-tiled gabled villas, and they in their turn give place to mingled fields and big new factories, until the fields finally triumphed. Round-backed hills crowned with beech woods began to break the flatness; sweeps of cornland, hayfields, here and there a large country house, formed the background of the view, while bright new groups of brick and stucco houses clustering round a bright new suburban railway station usurped the foreground at frequent intervals. The district had recently become "conveniently situated for town-workers" through the breaking up of several large estates, and the homes of the well-to-do professional classes with their attendant golf-links and tennis-clubs were already overbearing the dignified reserve of the country's agricultural and sporting past. The train stopped once or twice at shining white platforms, and middle-aged first-class season-ticket-holders, of a

HYSSOP

station and importance to leave business at half-past three, could be seen walking gently towards their homes as the train moved on its way or churning up the white dust of the roads with the wheels of their motor-cars. Philip felt the curious difference between the comfort of the prosperous stockbroker and that of the old house in Chiswick he had left little more than an hour ago. How forlorn and gloomy they would consider it, these self-confident business men with their white spats and yellow gloves, their vivid red houses, green-shuttered and white-painted, their tennis lawns and tiled paths, their laurel bushes and pergolas.

He was picturing their home-coming, the white paint and bright rugs of the hall, the white-capped maid carrying a tray to the tiled corner of the garden with its white semicircular seat, the young girls in white dresses who awaited its coming with refined indifference, when he felt the train check and realised that he had arrived. The station of Stansfield St. Mary was different from its sisters nearer London. It was dirtier, more utilitarian. The very design of its shelters spoke of an earlier age. Stansfield had been a town when the mushroom settlements south of it were still park land and pasture. By virtue of its industry it held a proud and squalid head above the decorative toyshop elegance of the mere residential suburb. Laddie was on the platform and as the two friends passed out of the station Philip saw the little town below him,

a jumble of old red roofs and new grey ones, a queer elongated blot of houses, its outer fringes bristled with tall chimneys and gloomed with smoke, its centre still retaining some of the old-fashioned feeling of the erstwhile market town.

His bags would come after, but it was safer to carry his tennis-racquet and stick. He walked by Laddie's side down the steep untidy road from the station, through an area of squalid red-brick cottages with dirty children playing in the side streets, and public-houses and little shops on the main road frontages between them, past a line of ancient almshouses, a public fountain and a picture theatre, into the market-place. From there it was only a step, first to the church, and then to the rectory adjoining.

The latter was reached through a tall green door in a white wall crowned with a yew hedge. Inside was a flagged path with trim pieces of lawn on either side. The path ran straight from the garden gate to the front door, which was painted white with black nails, and crowned by a pediment. Between the door jamb and the masonry was a semicircular fanlight. The house itself was tall, and rather square, with four rows of five windows except on the ground floor where the front door took the place of the centre window. It was a good example of the comfortable country-town houses built in the home counties during the eighteenth century and plastered over under the regency. They are

H Y S S O P

numerous in the suburbs and are even seen to-day, in somewhat derelict condition, swallowed up in the everlasting extension outwards of London itself. The rectory of Stansfield St. Mary still enjoyed, however, the surroundings it had been intended to suit. In front the trim walled garden adjoining the churchyard, behind a large shady stretch of lawn and flower-bed, a kitchen garden and small stables with an outlet on a side lane, kept it secluded and dignified, as utterly foreign to the squalid litter of the station road as it was suited to the worn mellowness of the market square.

Philip left his hat and stick in the white panelled hall, denied the necessity of washing his hands immediately and followed Laddie through the house and out of a glass-paned door at the back into the main garden. A flushed pinafores figure bowed over a flower-bed looked up at their steps, laid down a trowel and advanced smilingly, pulling off a pair of soil-stained gloves, preparatory to shaking hands.

"This is Philip, Tibs," said Laddie. "Phil—this is Tibs, or to the less intimate Christine."

"Or perhaps," said Philip as he shook hands, "Miss Macallister—to the less intimate still."

"Rot!" said Laddie. "Nobody's Miss or Mister here except tradesmen and children, are they, Tibs?"

Laddie's sister was several years his senior. She had gentle eyes and a beautiful skin. Though

slight and almost lean in build, she gave Philip a hand that was small and rather plump, an eminently soothing and maternal hand. She bid him welcome and stood with her arms down and held rather away from her sides.

"It's been rather warm for gardening. Now that the sun is getting behind the trees, though, it's better. I shall have to do a little watering. Our gardener hates watering. I can't get him to do it. But I think we'll have tea first. Did you see mother as you came through the house?"

Her brother shook his head.

"Not a soul. She's beautifying herself probably for the guest's benefit. More than can be said of the family as a whole!"

Christine laughed.

"I am rather disgraceful, I know, but an afternoon's unbroken gardening is so rare a treat I couldn't resist."

"Your garden does you credit at least," said Philip politely.

"How nice of you to say that," replied the young woman smilingly. "I'm afraid though it's not all my doing. Are you fond of gardening yourself?"

"Alas—Chiswick is no place for a gardener. I bury dead birds now and then and my mother keeps up a fiction that our patch might be brilliant if we tried to make it so, but I doubt the truth of the possibility and I'm certain both of her incapacity and mine to test it properly."

HYSSOP

A gong in the house stopped the banalities of conversation. Christine said she must fly, and Philip accepted Laddie's offer of a bathroom. In a few minutes he was conducted into a long, low drawing-room, running straight through the house with windows at each end. It was white-panelled like the hall, the furniture chintz covered. Philip noticed a grand piano and several book-cases let into the wall, behind whose glass doors gleamed the irregular sized and coloured rows of books that always mark the true book-lover or collector. Further observation was cut short by Mrs. Macallister rising from behind the tea-table and bearing down upon him.

It was impossible to believe this gaunt hard-faced woman to be Laddie's mother. Her scanty black hair was drawn tightly back. A black silk blouse hung loose on her flat chest. She took Philip's hand awkwardly and with unexpected strength.

"We are very glad to see you, Mr. Murray," she said pontifically, in a slow, deep voice. "I hope you had a pleasant journey. It is hot for travelling."

Philip murmured inaudible suitabilities and tried to collect his faculties. He could not say what exactly he had expected Laddie's family to be like, but certainly not like this. Even Christine didn't seem to belong; she was delightful and looked a perfect dear but, beyond that, ordinary. Mrs. Macallister was more impossible still. She might have been

mistress of a harsh and lonely manse in the highlands. In this cool, flower-scented drawing-room she was frankly incredible. How on earth . . . ? And whose taste had decorated the house ? Not Laddie's, which in all its erratic moods had never favoured quite this gentle temperate comfort. It couldn't be his mother. Christine was doubtless responsible for the flowers, but beyond that she seemed unlikely to assert herself over the strong grim personality, so upright behind the gleaming silver of the tea-tray. There remained the father. Parsons were usually too busy to decorate their houses, and seldom the men to resemble sons like Laddie. Bewildered into monosyllabic embarrassment Philip nibbled a cucumber sandwich. He noticed that even Laddie was subdued. He talked about the neighbours, about the train service, even about a bazaar. Christine was dutifully interested in parochial affairs. The mother talked sparingly, but with a pervading severity that forbade contradiction and discouraged further embroidery. It transpired that the Rector wouldn't be in till dinner ; that Firkins (who was Firkins ?) was really getting beyond a joke ; that Moses had eaten an almost untouched pound of Gorgonzola ; that Miss Mallory refused to meet Lady Carshalton because of the militants. Other revelations, equally cryptic and intriguing, would have doubtless followed had not the tempestuous entrance of a white bull-terrier cleared up one mystery and created a welcome diversion.

HYSSOP

Here at least was Moses. The beast, with his absurd face and inadequate ears, sniffed Philip disapprovingly and padded across the room to Mrs. Macallister. Taking up a position which commanded a good view of the food, he cocked one eye at the cake, the other at the mistress of the house and grinned expansively. He accepted a contribution with some noise and evident relish, slapped a large tongue over the bridge of his nose and grinned for more.

"Are you fond of dogs, Mr. Murray?" asked his hostess, in a voice which promised instant execution whatever answer was returned.

"He's a dear," said Philip evasively, and clicked an apologetic finger at Moses, who gave the stranger one glance, saw that the hand offered no food and resumed his vigil over the tea-table.

"I'm going to bring him up next term," remarked Laddie. "He'll devour anyone who comes to disturb my work."

"Ian will have to be very busy next year, so as to be ready for his examination—won't you, dear?"

Laddie shrivelled visibly at his mother's words and said he supposed he would. Christine's suggestion of an adjournment to the garden was hailed with relief by both boys. In the hall they found Philip's luggage. Laddie took him to his bedroom and proposed tennis. The sun would be off the court now. It might even be a bit cool.

It was a relief to get into flannels and Philip hurried his changing and was soon ready.

The tennis court was charming. Lying on one side of the garden it was bounded on the east by the high wall, on the west by tall cedars which robbed the evening sun of any unpleasantly interfering influence. The grass was close and healthy and the surface perfect. Laddie, as a tennis expert, could be trusted to have the wiring-in adequate. They played two sets, while Christine glided gently about the garden, appearing now and then among the trees and beaming on them silently before returning to her watering. The harsh influence of Mrs. Macalister began to wear off in this mellow old English garden with the quaintly delightful figure in a billowy pinafore and gardening gloves moving placidly about in the level evening light.

Laddie drove a weak return on to the back line and threw up his racquet.

"Set. Beat you this time, old thing. Let's go and get a drink."

They strolled towards the house.

"You're in great form, Laddie."

"It's frightfully chancy. If I'd played like I did to-day against Fanshawe I'd have won the Varsity singles. Unfortunately I didn't. Bob's coming home to-morrow some time. There's a push for tennis here on Saturday. That's all the thrills I think; I expect you'll be very bored. Still you can always go away."

H Y S S O P

They drank lemonade in the dining-room.

"Your house is lovely," said Phil. "Who's the furniture expert?"

"Oh, the Reverend. He's a nailer on that kind of thing. The worst of the house is we have to have lots of mahogany to be in period, but we both like oak best."

"We both." The words struck Philip at once. Laddie and his father were the friends in this house. Probably the soldier son and the mother formed the opposition, while Christine belonged soothingly to every party. He felt a keen curiosity to see the Rector. Laddie was continuing:

"Our real joy is the study. It was all that remained of the abbey here—of course, the present church is late Tudor at the best, and lots of it later still. There was a monastery or something on this site in the fifteenth century and it was destroyed in the Reformation. Only one atom remained—probably a bit of the refectory—which was built into a farm-house and then used as a dairy or washhouse when the present house was built. The Reverend was on to it at once when he came here first, and has gradually been furnishing it as it should be. My mother disapproves of it rather, because its stone floor is either damp or gives a lot of work to the servants, I forget which. Come and see it."

Philip followed along a corridor, past evident kitchens and pantries, through a glassed-in

passage that had been run across a small yard and into a low stone doorway with a heavy oak door. Inside he stood and gazed about him. The room was long and low. Once it had doubtless had a high-pitched roof open to the laths except for criss cross-beams, but now the lowest beams were built into a whitewashed ceiling. At the further end a great open fire-place was raised nearly two feet above the level of the actual threshold upon which he stood. The hearthstone had been carried out and forward right across the room. A second, intermediate level made of the floor a staircase of three very broad and shallow steps.

Low book-cases in pale bleached oak ran along the right-hand wall. A huge skin-covered couch, low and very broad, stood against the corner on the wide hearthstone, opposite a worn, leather arm-chair and a low leather-cushioned stool. The room was lighted by four narrow Gothic lancets along the wall facing the book-case and by a deeply recessed square window to the immediate right of the fire, behind the couch. On the intermediate floor level and directly in front of the firestool was one of those square German fifteenth-century tables with heavy cross-legs and a single deep drawer. It was covered with papers and materials for writing. Drawn up to it was a low-backed box-like oak chair with linen fold panels on both sides and a rough bleached back. The rest of the furniture in the room consisted of a great linen-press with three

HYSSOP

tall slim doors, a low credence with a pierced tracery design in its central cupboard, a plain coffer, and a high oak screen that cut off the entrance from the rest of the room. The walls were whitewashed and unadorned except for an ancient crucifix that hung between the lancets. On the stone floor were skins and one or two dull brown or deep red rugs.

"Laddie, how perfect."

His friend's eyes shone with pleasure. He conducted Philip about the room, handling each piece of furniture as though he loved it, calling attention to this piece of carving and that, to the hatchet marks on the plain hewn wood, to the occasional pieces of restoration.

"When we can afford it we mean to panel the whole. The Reverend has a few pieces already, but not nearly enough. Isn't it a joy? And when you hear him in here, those evenings he's a bit free, you'll realise that it isn't only the 'antiques' that make the room.

"You'd never suspect it existed to look at the house outside. I don't believe our predecessors came in here at all, except the servants. The Reverend has told me it was used as a mixture of potting shed and box-room and bicycle house. Of course he has practically rebuilt it. But he's done it fearfully well."

It was getting dusk and Philip asked what time dinner was. The clock said seven thirty-five and there was a rush to bath and dress for eight o'clock. The heat during the day had been

considerable but not so oppressive as to suggest immediate thunder. Philip was surprised as he struggled with his dress-shirt, to hear a low rumble and the heavy patter of raindrops. It had got suddenly more than dusk. By the time he was ready it was raining hard. He met Laddie on the stairs and they entered the drawing-room together. Mrs. Macallister, in a black dress severely unbecoming, was sweeping up a litter of petals on the hearth, preparatory to lighting a fire.

"It will be colder after this storm. Fancy a fire in July," she observed. The remark like much of her conversation seemed to call for no response. Philip stood about absurdly, while Laddie sniffed a neighbouring anchusa.

"Doesn't smell," he murmured reproachfully.

Christine drifted in in a fluffy white gown. Her *coiffure* missed chances all along the line. Then the gong went.

"We won't wait for father," said Mrs. Macallister, moving towards the door, "he's always late."

But when they reached the dining-room a cheerful figure beamed at them from the hearth-rug.

"Neatly done, you'll all admit." And the Rector came forward to greet his son's friend.

The Reverend Angus Macallister was of medium height, and had a most engaging smile. He inclined to baldness, but his red-brown eyebrows

H Y S S O P

and such hair as remained showed what his natural colour had been and explained the fresh rather highly coloured complexion. His expression was very sane and very humorous. Only his eyes had a tinge of melancholy which never wholly faded. Both his son and daughter had inherited this intangible but unforgettable hint of gentleness. Otherwise they resembled him very little. Indeed after a day or two Philip began to realise how very strong was Laddie's likeness to his mother, at least in features. Only those lines about the eyes were different and they changed the whole.

The Rector pervaded the dinner table from the start. He talked with unfailing skill on subjects with which the guest could not fail to be familiar. He joked with Christine about her garden, asked Laddie how the back-hand half-volleys were going on, even rallied his wife about the white paint on the landing. With the disappearance of the fish, conversation had been launched and the Rector immediately took a more subordinate part. The atmosphere was utterly different to that of the drawing-room tea. The meal seemed to pass with incredible swiftness.

A courtesy quarter of an hour in the drawing-room ended with the clergyman's loudly expressed desire to smoke (an indulgence forbidden in his wife's domain), and he strode off to the famous study followed by the two boys.

As Mrs. Macallister had foretold, the evening

was rather chilly, and no one was sorry to find a log fire blazing in the high open hearth.

At night the study was lit by plain half-circles of electric lamps bracketed against the walls. Near the fire-place, on the table, and below the crucifix, were standard lamps made of converted brass candlesticks. Only the lights immediately about the hearth were turned on. Philip was given the arm-chair, Laddie lay back on the couch, the Rector stood before the fire. All three filled pipes. Moses appeared from nowhere in particular and jumped up beside Laddie.

“Oh, Moses,” said Laddie. “What would missis say?” This was construed by Moses to be an interesting problem but not an order to get off, so he flicked his tongue as near his master’s nose as possible, curled up, grunted and went to sleep.

“Well, what do you think of my room?” asked the Rector, with unabashed eagerness.

“I think it’s the jolliest I have ever seen, sir,” replied Philip. “I wish you would tell me more about it. Laddie was rhapsodical but nebulous.”

“Got a match?” interjected the traduced one.

The box rattled on to Moses’ back who opened an incurious eye and closed it again. The Rector drew at his pipe several times and began.

“I’ll start at the very beginning. When I took the living twenty years ago this room was divided into two parts. Each part had at one time or

H Y S S O P

another been cheaply lined with match-boarding, which was rotten and breaking away. There was, of course, no passage connection to the house and there was a door about there," he pointed to where the crucifix hung. "Outside the walls were plastered. There was a large skylight in the roof that served as window for both rooms—if you can call them rooms. The flooring was tiled in one half—my predecessor used it as a sort of extra larder; in the other it was simply trodden mud. Now, of course, I knew about the monastery that used to be on the site and was curious to find any traces. One day I came into the shed, as it was called, to find a bit of wood or something, and was wondering whether the match-boarding was worth repairing, when my eye caught the coping of that window down there by the door. The boarding had fallen away and the stonework was visible. I was very excited and tore away as much of the woodwork as I could without proper tools. Sure enough it was a Gothic window walled up. Of course, the next step was to clear the place out. I had workmen in and we stripped the walls. We discovered not only four lancet windows, but the present doorway and what remained of the fire-place. I have tried in restoring it to keep as faithfully as possible to the laws of period and yet make the room practical for modern use. Of course, the old roof had gone long ago. Those beams are contemporary but not belonging—so to speak."

“And the floor?”

“Oh, I had to do all that. There were some fragments of paving left which are incorporated but nothing like all of it. Then I made the square window and—that was about all, wasn’t it, Laddie?”

The son nodded.

“And the furniture you have collected?”

“Yes. I had my table—bought it in Germany when I was quite a youngster for thirty or forty shillings. The credence came from Norfolk—I’d never have got it if I hadn’t been a parson. Perquisites, you see. The big cupboard and the chair I’ve bought since. There was trouble about the chair, old chap, do you remember?”

Father and son laughed like children at the remembrance of the event. “Mamma kicked up a row,” thought Philip.

“I have to-day seen,” said the Rector slowly, “the prie-Dieu I have always wanted for the crucifix.”

“Oh, Reverend,” shouted Laddie, “how splendid! Where?”

“In London,” replied his father gravely.

“London?—You’ve not—Is *that* why you couldn’t come home for tea? You are a rip. And we pictured you soothing the last hours of some dying parishioner.”

The Rector laughed aloud with delight.

“Well, I had to be in town anyhow, and I was passing Crosby’s and thought there were such lots of trains. . . . He came running up as soon

H Y S S O P

as I got into the shop. 'I've got something in will interest you.' And there the blessed thing was. After all these years."

"Was it fearfully expensive?" asked Laddie anxiously.

"It wasn't gratis by any means."

"Are you going to . . . ?"

"I shall have to talk to your mother. It would be a thousand pities . . . after waiting so long." He sighed; the lust of collecting shone wistfully in his eyes. Philip would not have been his father's son had he failed to recognise the symptom.

"It's awful cheek I know," he began tentatively, "but Laddie said something about panelling this room. . . . I wondered . . . wouldn't it . . . I mean it's so jolly as it is . . . more monastic . . . kind of."

"Leave it alone, you think?" The Reverend brooded over the room. Suddenly his face lighted. "Why, Laddie, if we chuck the panelling scheme we can exchange the pieces there are with old Crosby and raise the balance. If the opposition realise the panelling is abandoned there'll be so much saved on that." He turned to Philip. "You've solved our difficulty superbly. My wife thinks I'm very extravagant—yes, I suppose I am—and we have to be careful. We are really immensely grateful."

Philip coloured with pleasure. "We" again he noticed. The *ententes* in this household became clearer still.

For a few minutes the Rector and his son talked excited technicalities of period, style of carving and colour.

"Poor old Phil," said Laddie at last. "He looks bored stiff. Our manners, Reverend, are not what they were."

Conversation became general again.

"Oh, by the way, Laddie," said his father after a bit. "Have you read a book called 'Wild Oats'?"

"Not that foul novel by Blent with an awful uncle in it who writes letters?"

"Well, I recognise it from your description."

"Good Lord, I should say I had read it. That's the thing I was so furious about last term, do you remember, Phil? Filthy, disingenuous, puritanical cant disguised as knowledge of the world."

"Do be careful, Laddie," said Philip, laughing. "We were quite anxious about you before. He was so violent, Mr. Macallister, we had to read him to sleep with Byron."

"I don't think we need be alarmed," replied the Rector, his eyes twinkling. "Laddie's hardened to the shocks of these attacks. I hoped I might send him off by mentioning the book. He's almost worth risking—for the pleasure his tirades give others. Go on, old chap. Tell me your opinion of the book's general tendency?"

"You can try and be funny, Reverend, but you know you agree with me really. It's all cant every word of it. The uncle-type gets

HYSSOP

the best of both worlds. He makes fun of parsons for having ideals about decency, or as he calls it for being hypocritical kill-joys, and all the time he prates about the sanctity of pure womanhood and the wholesome manliness of Leicester Square."

"I agree with you that parsons are made scapegoats for the community more so than their frequent failings justify, but I don't know whether I follow you to the logical extreme of your agreement, which is the establishment of a Leicester Square for young girls."

"If that was in the least my position I should certainly maintain that sowers of wild oats should rather be elected on adult suffrage than by the present one-sided system. But you don't understand that if the uncles would only leave us alone, there'd be no need for wild oats at all—and then sowing would become purely the hobby of a few like collecting or golf? The normal expression of the instinct which civilisation has abnormalised into Leicester Square would have its scope and the club-loungers wouldn't be asked their opinions about it at all."

"Why are you down on the uncles only, Laddie?" asked Philip. "What about the aunts and even the nieces?"

"The aunts are nearly as stale as parsons. It's only side-tracking the whole problem. My point is that the people really at the bottom of the trouble are the people who pose as 'good-fellows' or 'dogs.' The people 'who can tell a

good story after dinner' (never during dinner, mind you, that's contrary to code), 'sports,' 'men of the world,' they've a hundred *aliases*. As for the nieces, poor devils, they don't know any better. Good care is taken that they shan't. If they find out for themselves, they're imprisoned and forcibly fed and flogged and sighed over by politicians."

"But you are always inveighing against the average suffragette yourself," objected the Rector.

"Because they want to substitute a female tyranny for a male one. It's only transition though. The majority of them are bitter or ugly and despise men instead of grovelling to them. But that won't last. Besides—anything would be better than the existing state of affairs."

"Your programme as Prime Minister would be a bit incoherent I'm afraid."

"Oh, I know I'm muddly about it. The whole question is muddly, thanks to centuries of uncles. But we've got to go on tilting at wind-mills and eventually upsetting them. One will turn out to be a giant, sooner or later."

Mr. Macallister knocked out his pipe, smiling at Philip.

"Do you belong to the neo-quixotes?"

"I think I do really," replied Philip, "but I'm naturally more cautious than Laddie. I haven't his royal scorn of consistency and logic."

Laddie laughed good-humouredly. "You won't get me annoyed. I'm through for to-night

HYSSOP

too. Let us talk about something else. Reverend—hold forth about the parish.”

The Rector lit another pipe and sat on the stool looking into the fire.

After a moment he began to describe the varied problems of Stansfield St. Mary, with its slums, its prosperous tradespeople, its church-party of ladies with too much time and only one idea of how to occupy it, its few London business men and its surrounding ring of big country houses. As he talked Philip wondered whether any man could reconcile so many conflicting elements. The Rector was frank over his difficulties, over the excessive zeal of some, the indifference and selfishness of others, the down-right hostility of yet more.

“It’s a hopeless task, I sometimes think,” he said, “but I wouldn’t leave it for anything.” It was only afterwards that Philip learnt what preferments he had declined in order to stay on and wrestle with the indissoluble problems that time had made as precious as they were baffling.

When one o’clock struck, Philip could hardly believe his ears. Everyone said, “Good heavens ! one o’clock !” They rose and stretched and moved bedwards. While Moses was having his run the two boys stood in the little yard between the study and the house. The air was fresh and still. The storm had done its work and passed by, leaving a night of stars.

II

The next day, about eleven o'clock in the morning, a small, fawn-coloured, rather self-important motor dithered and coughed at the garden gate. The soldier-son, thought Philip, and lurked near a window to observe and be within reach of introduction. He saw a very firm young man in large herring-bone tweeds and brown shoes cross the narrow piece of lawn. The front door opened and a loud voice shouted "E——mma!" Hitherto the arrival had been unrealised by the family, but hasty stirrings from various directions and barks from Moses showed that meetings were about to begin. From behind the half-closed door of his refuge Philip heard the succession of welcomes. First Christine, breathless and sisterly, "How nice to see you, Bob dear." Then Laddie's drawl, rather distant, "Just coming, general. How's the army?" Finally Mrs. Macallister's tread and her oracular, "You are in good time, Robert. I hope the car went well." The only reply audible was a direction to a scuffling noise who must have been Emma, to get the kit-bag out of the car. The next minute Laddie shouted for Philip, who discovered himself. He was thrown at the new-comer's head in Laddie's usual manner:

"A guest, general—from the seat of learn-

HYSSOP

ing—one Philip Murray. Phil, this is my little brother.”

Second-Lieutenant Robert Murray was very like his brother in colour and feature, but he was square and inclined to be angular. When they were together the two looked like a “Before and After Use” advertisement, the parts to be apportioned as the commodity in question was a Scandinavian invigorator or a fashionable corset. Philip saw a clear but rather haughty eye look him up and down and felt his hand held and relinquished, as one holds and relinquishes the necessary but jammy fingers of a strange child. Cordiality was not Robert’s line.

“I must toddle out and bait the car,” he said, and left them.

The days went by quietly and pleasantly. Philip became more familiar with the characters of his friend’s family. The Rector was so busy as to be sometimes hardly visible all day, but his leisure hours unfailingly rallied at least Laddie and Philip to the quiet grey room with the Gothic furniture.

Robert came less often. He had a grievance against his father for refusing to sacrifice this, the only possible room, to a billiard table. He had numerous friends in the surrounding county and spent his leave motoring about the country from one to another of their houses. Christine went her quiet unselfish way, cherishing her garden or her poor old women or helping to entertain the tireless callers who haunted the Rectory.

Mrs. Macallister alone remained somewhat of a mystery. She hated gardening and hated animals; she hardly ever read and such house-keeping as had not devolved upon Christine she performed with a gloomy ferocity that made the endurance of Emma and her fellows seem little short of miraculous. But, for all that in externals his hostess was rather repellent than otherwise, Philip found himself growing under the spell of her intensity. He began to realise that she had really established herself in the minds of her husband's parishioners as a kind of Anglican Delphi, and her pronouncements, when acted upon, seldom failed to achieve satisfactory results.

With Saturday came the tennis party. The occasion did duty for a garden party as well, and Philip, in his inexperience of such functions, concluded that every man in white flannels was a tennis player, and trembled when he saw the crowd. But a second, though inferior tennis court, existed in the Rectory garden, and the number of actual players among the invited men turned out to be not so large as to make play a farce.

The guests were chiefly "county" and among them was Dudley Waterson, with a perfect crease down his trousers and two pretty sisters. The latter intrigued Philip vastly, and he had miniature but satisfying flirtations with one after the other. They played tennis as one eats ices—in the intervals of better things and in company with the other sex. Trixie, on the other hand,

HYSSOP

showed an absorbed earnestness in the game, which merited greater skill. He fluttered passionately about the court pushing balls gently over the net and murmuring plaintif encouragement to himself all the while !

“ Not bad, old thing, not at all bad. Jove ! that came hard ; nasty rough man on the other side hit it . . . oh you silly blighter—*over* the net not under . . . *another* fault ? Impossible ! Quite extraordinary ! ” . . . and so on.

Robert Macallister was present as a favour to the company. He despised tennis and had not even the satisfaction of being a good player. Also he despised garden parties, but the tradition of the subaltern demanded that the warrior should be a “ devil with the girls,” and in the train of short white skirts and twinkling ankles he allowed himself loftily to be drawn.

The party had the popular features of its kind. There were the bad players who had to be told they were good, and the slightly better players who told you so themselves. There were fluffy apologetic young women who began by saying they weren't going to say “ sorry ” when they missed anything, and then never said or did anything else. There was even the stout old gentleman who said he was too old for games now, but was annoyed at being taken at his word. Finally, there was a residue of reasonably good and serious performers who found each other out and played several sets among themselves until the light got too bad to go on any more.

After the guests had all gone Philip and the brothers lay about Laddie's sitting-room with cigarettes and drinks. Robert had to go back on Monday and complained bitterly. Laddie, as ever, ragged him unmercifully. Philip had ceased to wonder at the patience with which the subaltern endured his brother's jibes, when he realised that here was but another slave to Laddie's tongue. As a matter of fact the two brothers got on very well and were not without their mutual admirations. Even to Philip Robert softened into something like friendliness. On this evening they made themselves late for dinner, discussing the respective attractions of Trixie's sisters.

After dinner, bridge was suggested by the Rector, who didn't play himself and wanted a quiet evening for the morrow's sermon. Mrs. Macallister took a stately hand, and, with Laddie as partner, knocked Philip and Robert silly. She never forgot anything and there was something about her that drove all thoughts of possible guile from her opponents' heads. Not until she had "put over" a third perfectly hopeless no-trumper did Philip steel himself to disbelieve her manner. "As soon expect Boadicea to finesse," he thought. But he doubled her next call of four royals and forced Laddie to take her out in impossible diamonds which certainly lessened though it couldn't avert a heavy defeat. After which Mrs. Macallister's winnings were not so overwhelming.

HYSSOP

The coming of wet weather coincided with Philip's visit to his Yorkshire aunt and he left Stansfield, to pick up some Greats work at Chiswick, with a very keen regret that his stay could not be longer. But it was long enough to see the prie-Dieu installed in the study, and he took away with him a vivid memory of the Rector beaming delightedly from his place before the hearth at the frail but simple dignity of the ancient piece of blue-grey oak.

Yorkshire in its fine intervals gave him tennis, and some desultory rabbit-shooting; in its wet an opportunity of reading not only philosophy but Balzac. The latter he had never before tackled; the task seemed so enormous. Now the discovery of an almost complete collection in his aunt's dusty, little-used library tempted him to begin, and once begun it needed a very fine day or a very important engagement to make him stop. His visit prolonged itself to past the middle of September. A placid, but to Philip rather pathetic, letter from his mother showed her about to start for the early autumn stay in Italy which was threatening, like nearly all her actions, to become a habit. He hurried home and conducted her south. They visited a few old friends in Lucerne, where it was vilely hot, and Geneva, where it was vilely wet. By the time they reached Bologna and the weather had achieved the warm graciousness of a good Italian autumn, Philip found his vacation was running to an end. He left his mother at Lucca, as ever quite content to

make no plans and go where events seemed to draw her, and travelled straight through to London. The house at Chiswick was emptily impressive. He stayed two days alone, and got himself to Oxford rather early on the afternoon the college was supposed to meet.

Chapter Five

THE FLOWER SHOP

I

THE quiet course of the long vacation had left Philip not only cured of his external eccentricities but older and soberer in mind. He was looking forward immensely to his third year at Oxford, but sat in his room this first evening pondering rather gloomily on the immediate future. It was Laddie's last year. He would be working hard and not easy to see much of. Also he was out of college. But there was all life to see him in—unless he went to Tahiti, as he threatened, to search for Gauguin relics. Philip told himself not to cry over milk that was still unspilt. He sat in his chair gazing into the fire. The room had the bare, empty feeling of the first night of term. On the table lay a few scattered envelopes—the usual notices of chapels, an appeal to attend mission lectures at St. Saviour's, a bill or two. The book-cases looked inhospitable, unused. But it was a delightful room and last year had taught him to love it. He looked at the Medici print over the fire-place—the famous

THE FLOWER SHOP

Beatrice d'Este (as he still insisted on calling her)—and felt, as strong as ever, the charm of the burnished coils of hair, the proud column of slender neck. Why were there no girls like that nowadays? Laddie scoffed at him for having a Medici print, but when the other pictures of his first year had given place to water-colours and chalk drawings by his friends in Paris, he had refused to dethrone his goddess from her place. Her lips were wonderful. How she must have loved—and hated. . . .

A cheerful voice in the passage roused him, and the figure of Jack Cartwright appeared in the doorway.

“Hullo, Jack!”

“Hullo, Phil! Glad to see you again. Had a good vac.?”

In college Jack was now, because of his rowing, a prominent figure; but his familiarity with the self-styled “great” of Wallace had not turned him from his other friends.

Jack embarked on his vacation adventures. He had danced, fished, golfed, gone on a reading party, and ended up with some shooting.

“Why didn’t you come to Henley, you slacker? We had a great time. Charlie Meyerstein’s governor has a big house on the river and after the rowing was over gave us a dinner and a dance. Some damned pretty girls. I’m head over heels with one of them.”

“Again—Jack,” interposed Philip.

“No—but it’s serious this time. She has

H Y S S O P

lovely dark hair and blue eyes and dances wonderfully. When we were having supper someone upset some mayonnaise down her back and I jumped up and shouted—‘What the hell!’—and it was old Meyerstein himself! I thought it was a waiter you know—and felt rather a fool. But he was awfully decent about it, fearfully sorry and all that. Nora took it like a sportsman and went and changed and was down again in two ticks. ”

“Nora what ? ” asked Philip.

“Stephenson. Know her ? ”

“Not from Eve. Did you kiss her ? ”

“Idiot—of course I didn’t. I only saw her this one time. What do you take me for ? ”

“A Picaro ruined by spats.”

But Jack had picked up one of the bills from the table and was launched at once on a statement of his finances.

“Broke absolutely. I owe Pitson God knows how much and heaps of others.”

“I’ve never known you when you weren’t broke, Jack, but you’re not in prison yet. How is it ? ”

“Oh, well—when I say broke—— But what have you been doing ? ”

Philip began to outline his uneventful vacation, but Jack lost interest in the account long before it was half over and prepared to wander off.

“Got a heap of things to do,” he said, laughing.

“Excuse me running away.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Philip good-

THE FLOWER SHOP

humouredly, "I want to see if Dallas is up yet."

As they went downstairs Jack remarked that he couldn't understand what Philip saw in Dallas Merrick :

"Dull kind of fish I think. Americans are very jolly and all that—but I never know what to talk to them about. So serious somehow."

"I fear you don't appreciate, Jack, what an exceptionally intelligent and sympathetic listener you have in me," said Philip, laughing, "or you wouldn't blame those who fall short of the ideal. Because Dallas doesn't shoot or row and hasn't the intimate knowledge that I have of the subtle charm of English maidenhood, you despise him. Try him with democratic institutions, or trust legislation, or baseball——"

Jack said, "Shut up. Good night," and vanished in the gloom of the quad. Philip wandered out of college to the street where his American friend had found lodgings for his last year.

Dallas Merrick was standing by his fire-place in grave contemplation of a half-opened packing-case, from which a froth of shavings had already invaded the carpet, while among the remaining shavings, still enclosed in the case, there gleamed forth the smooth yellow curves of grape-fruit. Dallas was short, rather nondescript in colour, with a thin dry face, lined about the neat, reticent lips, and behind his rimless pince-nez two keen and curious eyes observed the world with kindly criticism. His room had the bareness charac-

HYSSOP

teristic of every sojourner in a strange land. Pictures, for the most part photographs of historic buildings and paintings which he had seen during his untiring European travels in vacation, adorned the walls in an arrangement so casual as to suggest that they had flown in at the window and perched here and there as the whim took them. Two framed views of Harvard—the Soldiers' Field and his former dormitory, a group of square-faced eager youths in rowing togs and, on a shelf, a long row of aggressively paper-labelled collected editions betrayed the nationality of their owner. Possibly Philip's placid nature had attracted to him this American, who, coming to Wallace after graduating at Harvard, found the abbreviated conversations and the rapid, inconsequential, intentionally flippant ideas of the Wallace men both too young and too elusive for easy comprehension. He had made friends, was indeed always liked by those who knew him, but he felt that he could never become really a member of the Oxford world, that its conventions and habits of mind were utterly strange to him, and he entered therefore on this, his last year, with a politely concealed longing for the time of return to America, mingled with a curiously poignant regret at leaving the magic tenderness of Oxford. He greeted Philip heartily, shaking him by the hand and expressing his pleasure at the reunion.

“My mother has sent me these,” he kicked the packing-case. “Do you like them?”

THE FLOWER SHOP

"I love them," said Philip.

"I'll send you half over to college then. I can't possibly eat them all myself. Where have you spent your vacation?"

"I went to stay with Laddie, in July. For the rest of the time I was in Yorkshire with an aunt, working and playing tennis and generally having a quiet time until I raced off to Italy with my mother. And you?—indefatigable as usual?"

"You would have blushed to see me 'doing' the Tyrol," returned Merrick. "All the elegant indifference that you taught me last year went down before my native lust for seeing Europe. Let us not open a painful and, to you, discouraging subject. I have some photographs and post cards——"

"Of course you have, you old sightseer. You must show them to me some other time. I came round to greet you and see what kind of digs you'd got. But I can't stay. Not a bad room this."

"It's fine. I've brought over the piano I had in college. Macallister is somewhere near here, isn't he?"

"Yes—round the corner, in St. Giles—with George Stratton. I alone am in college still—though there is always the faithful Jack."

"Cartwright?—of course," said Merrick politely. He was not intimate either with Jack or Laddie, and with his national punctiliousness he never called by their Christian names, to

HYSSOP

others, men whom he did not address personally with such familiarity. He looked wearily about the room and sighed.

"Why, Dal, I believe you're home-sick! You mustn't get lonely here, you know, all by yourself. Do you hate England more every day?"

"Sometimes I think I do, Philip, but it's nonsense of course."

"And all our hospitable charm has gone for nothing?"

"You know it hasn't. But you are always, so to speak, inviting me to share pleasures which are exquisite to you, but have for me the rather spasmodic joys of a poem only half understood. I get the 'ands' and 'buts' and here and there 'love' or 'song' or some simple word, but all the time I have to look in the dictionary for idiom. And you've no idea how looking in the dictionary spoils one's ease. You'd understand if you were to come to Harvard after this; even if you come and visit us, as you will, of course, you may have the feeling a bit; not so keenly as in a college perhaps, where talk and ideas are ultra-national, where even cosmopolitanism is selfish because it is exceptional, but to an extent. Still—I'm learning all the time."

"You have a craze for information, Dal. They say that it is easy to tell an American in England because his eye is bright and questioning, while the English eye is, what you would call,

THE FLOWER SHOP

‘bovine,’ and I, in self defence, ‘discreetly incurious.’ I wish I could come and see you in America but there seems to be no chance at present. I have to start in at the Home Office nearly at once if I get through the exam. It’s going to be a grind.—This term is almost my last real one. Not till one’s last five terms at Oxford does one have to make any leisure to work in. But then it’s the thing itself. I must go. Good night and cheer up.”

Walking back to college he gave himself up to the fascination of Oxford at night. The streets were not yet fully awake to the new term. That is to say there were not many undergraduates about, nor many of the complementary shop-girls; the college gates, by which he passed, gaped shadowy and luggage-strewn; the tobacconist in the Turl was shut, an unheard of thing at nine o’clock. But the place was very lovely and Philip felt, as he had felt often before, a desire to hug to him this vivid, caustic but royally indolent city, where more blasphemy and foulness are spoken and more beauty and reverence learnt than in any other city of the world. The arc-lights filled the Broad with a cold radiance, impartial and nonchalant, which made its emptiness doubly complete. In contrast to the blind eyes of the shop windows on his left, the windows of Wallace twinkled eagerly, here and there, in the niches of the great baronial front. Before the gate stood a solitary hansom.

The porch was tenanted by several men,

HYSSOP

regarding each other with quiet geniality, meeting after a long separation. Just before Philip turned in at the gate, a bowler-hatted figure had quitted the hansom and entered the college ahead of him. He was junior to Philip and the men in the porch were of his intimates. They smiled gently and nodded. One ventured a mild joke. The reunion was accomplished; etiquette and inclination limited it to this. As Philip was passing the group he saw, what had been hidden from him before, a solitary figure, slender-waisted and wearing light grey spats, reading a card on the notice-board.

“Ah! Ça va bien, mon cher?” Laddie turned round, rather pale, very immaculate. He spoke petulantly:

“I thought you were never coming up, Phil. I’ve been here since five; too awful. George doesn’t come till Monday so my digs are a desolation. College is full of brisk and perspiring second-years, terrified of being mistaken for freshmen. I’ve been shaken hands with three times, been slapped on the back by some monster, and asked how I enjoyed the Varsity match by two dons. The college is going to the dogs. By the way, Ninette has left Chevrillon. Terrible scene in the studio, Ninette going for him with a bread knife and only silenced by being knocked down with a heavy palette. Drama of jealousy I believe—something of that kind. She’s taken up with that little beast Kahn.”

THE FLOWER SHOP

“How do you know all this?”

“I’ve just come back from Paris. Went there early in September to escape a visit to an immense family of cousins in Hampshire who have a cricket week—at least that’s what they call it, but it’s really another kind of ‘match’ they care about—and I can’t bear flirting. It’s like being kicked out of a table d’hôte dinner after the soup. There’s a new Verhaeren coming out and I’ve discovered a genius in a garret in Belleville. How are you?”

“I’m feeling very philosophical and thirsty. Let us repair to my suite and drink.”

They did so and talked for more than an hour. At last Laddie rose and stretched himself. “When are you going to take down that distressing Medici? I must go and unpack. To-morrow I shall buy several thousand pounds’ worth of flowers in an endeavour to cloak my landlady’s idea of wall-paper and chair-covers. Come and call for me at eleven and we’ll do the deed together.”

He departed, and Philip set about the re-humanising of his room.

Eleven-fifteen next morning found him in the airy sitting-room of Laddie’s digs, gazing absently over St. Giles, while his friend dressed. That ceremony over they sought a flower shop in Cornmarket where, said Laddie, inferiority of goods was more than made up by the maiden who dispensed them. She was certainly charming. Not more than seventeen, her manner was

HYSSOP

demure and gentle, and she replied to Laddie's cryptic but cheerful conversation with a slightly puzzled simplicity. Laddie introduced them—"Daisy, this is Mr. Murray. Phil—Miss Johnson. Yes—I'll have four bunches of those."

For a while they pottered about the shop, Laddie unable to decide which shade of yellow was necessary for his dressing-table, and chattering incessantly about nothing all the while.

"She's a dear," said Philip when they left the shop.

"Yes—I'm very fond of her. I'm, so to speak, mounting guard over her. I'm not going to have friend Burkett or any of his lot putting their noses in there. But I fear I shall be too busy this year to be as vigilant. I depute my charge to you, if it's not a burden."

"Of course not," said Philip, and they passed on together.

II

The Saturday at the end of the second full week of term was the date appointed for the Sepoys' dramatic and musical production. Interest among friends of the performers was keen, while to the Sepoys themselves the approach of the night which was to show the result of their efforts was a matter of almost hysterical fascination. They both over and under-estimated their own importance in the Oxford world, and

THE FLOWER SHOP

there is little doubt that their dual miscalculation is not an infrequent one. They imagined that their contemporaries and immediate seniors regarded their intellectual and anarchical progress with mingled envy and admiration. As a matter of fact, their views were of very little interest to their equals, because the latter were quite satisfied with their own worlds and ambitions and would have tended, had they considered the Sepoys at all, to regard them as amiable but mistaken freaks. Among the junior members of the university, however, where admiration was neither expected nor considered, the Sepoys and what they stood for were in many quarters almost a cult. It must be remembered that the actual Sepoy Club, itself a mushroom growth, consisted of a definite band of men, all previously friends, who had in their several colleges striven to make themselves notorious for very similar behaviour and ideas. Consequently there were, among the more precocious freshmen of this year, several who came to Oxford deliberately prepared to sit at the feet of the men, whom they called, according to the colleges they had joined, "Vardon and Tamworth's set," or "the Laddie Macallister crowd"—and so on.

When the great night arrived and the big room of the performance was packed with audience, the actors noticed with some surprise that quite half the spectators were men they knew as promising freshers, or didn't know at all, they having been brought by those

HYSSOP

second-year men, who were sufficiently intimate with one or other of the caste to have been invited. The senior residue were scornful or vaguely friendly or merely curious. All elements combined however to make as much noise as possible before the curtain rose.

The invitations had described the "Ourango Tango Girl" as a "musical comedy in the classic manner," which was interpreted to mean a very conventional musical comedy indeed. And so it was.

Difficulties of finding a leading-lady had compelled Laddie to abandon the orchestra to Wavell, a rather sallow Wallace man in his second year, who composed popular songs for his own and his friend's benefit, and who began proceedings by an elaborate overture in the unsatisfactory "potpourri" manner of the operetta stage, giving just enough of a popular tune to encourage the audience to sing or whistle and then changing to something else before they had really got going.

The curtain was jerked aside at last revealing two coffee-coloured individuals in an exaggerated state of nudity, who described themselves as nautch girls and lay on the ground fanning themselves voluptuously with copies of the Isis. They appeared frequently throughout the performance in various costumes, now as dissolute native houris, now as jolly tars, now again as monkeys, and so on, according to the requirements of scene and subject. Some patter

THE FLOWER SHOP

between the nautch girls and a native policeman led up to the entrance, with much shading of eyes and pointing on the part of the chorus, of Pumblechook, as an Oriental monarch of immense dignity and bloodthirsty tendencies who repeated (he had no voice) a recitative of his difficulties in finding a husband for his daughter the Princess Gourdoulie, who made the impossible conditions that her lover must be English, preferably of noble birth, and at the same time conversant with the language and manners of Ourango Tango Land. Perhaps her father's remarkably cosmopolitan attainments made the future more hopeful than seemed likely.

The audience was so plainly bored, that the indignant father forgot his lines, and being too shortsighted to read the cues which one of the nautch girls thrust in his face in pretence of fanning him, decided to gag. This he did by calling the native policeman a "dirty dog" and stepping on one of the nautch girls' toes, who said "damn" audibly and limped away to a neighbouring palm grove to recuperate. Great sensation was now caused by the simultaneous entrance of Vardon as "Lieut. the Hon. Jackie Fitzmainwaring, R.N." with his friend Commodore St. Leger in immaculate flannels and yachting caps and, from the other corner of the stage, Laddie in a gauze scarf and earrings with a tremendous black wig and a tambourine. This was the signal for the first big

HYSSOP

song composed by Wavell. The chorus was a triumph.

I'm { the Onrango Tango
She's { Sweet-sliced mango
Flash-in-the-pango girl.

The final lines rang through the quad as the audience shouted the encore.

All trace of plot having entirely and relievingly disappeared, from now on there were numerous "moments." As when Douglas Field as the sporting flapper and Philip as Commodore St. Leger sang their ragtime duct,

Will you sleep fore when I sleep aft?
There's a little cabin aft for you.

When Laddie, with the lights extinguished and an electric torch in his hand which illuminated the tip of his nose, sang a sentimental ballad about the "Cactus in my heart"; when a Rhodes scholar from Magdalen who strode about with a big cigar and a squashy hat, followed by an incredible son with enormous shoe laces, a very small cap and a sack back coat, croaked—

I'm the company promoter
From my home in Minnesota
In my floater motor boater
In my floater motor boat—

the uproar became deafening. But perhaps the honours of the evening went to Lieut. the Hon. Jackie's song scena with the nautch girls

THE FLOWER SHOP

(now Parisian midinettes) which introduced the Wavell-Vardon masterpiece—

Come with me in a Wagon-lit
To the Bains de Mer,
Avecmwar in a sleeping car,
And I'll pay your fare.
Sail o'er the silvery sea with me,
Scatter the L.S.D. with me,
I want you so to be with me,
Ma-arie Claire.

Copious refreshments and a sweltering atmosphere ensured enthusiasm, and the ladies of the company received many insulting proposals from admirers in the stalls. The entertainment ended close on midnight in confusion. As the Wallace contingent returned home, great overcoats over the costumes they had had no time to change, Laddie sighed at the thought of the future :

“ My last bit of real Oxford, Phil. It's work, work from now onwards. You can keep the Sepoys going for a bit anyway, can't you ? ”

And Philip felt a pang of unwelcome change when they parted at the college gates, Laddie hastening to his digs, and he with the unruffled Wavell kicking the shuttered door to gain admission.

III

It seemed indeed that the passing of the Sepoys' musical comedy marked the close of an epoch. In his third year Philip was to pay the inevitable penalty of an Oxford friendship with a man senior to himself. Laddie now became, if not invisible, at least infrequent in appearance. Laddie's Wallace friends, who had many of them become Philip's, were equally absorbed in schools. Wallace seemed a wilderness of curiously aggressive freshmen, second-year men redeemed by such characters as Wavell, the residue of Philip's own year among whom was Jack Cartwright, and the dons. The Olympian splendour of the traditional third year promised to turn out largely tinsel and glitter. The dislocation of his life, however, did not worry Philip for very long and he soon moulded himself to the new conditions. First of all he did some work ; this and voracious unprofessional reading justified a greater amount of solitude. He realised with amazement that during his second year he had hardly ever spent more of his waking hours alone than the half-hour devoted to breakfast. The new experience was rather pleasant than otherwise.

The communal outlook also proved less gloomy than he had feared. Offensively precocious and opinionated freshmen, when regarded in the

THE FLOWER SHOP

more tolerant light of the next generation, became amusing studies in future possibility. Philip reflected that the third year's attitude to the first and even second was very much that of fathers and uncles to their children and nephews. The stages of each development seemed so familiar. The new-comers discovered Shaw, or young Toryism, or mystic ecstasy, or Post Impressionism, or Trade Union propaganda, or art linens, with just the triumphant sense of pioneer explorers that he and his friends had experienced. Every ancient Oxford paradox, clothed perhaps in slightly different garb, did its old yeoman service as an original epigram. Every clique and its dissolution, every orgy and its uproar, every eccentricity and its staging had the charm of an old experience relived. Philip laughed inwardly at the deference shown to him when he condescended to speak on Modern English Novelists to a mushroom society of *littérateurs*. How little did his eager, admiring listeners know the unconscious plagiarisms that he had only just himself left behind. Even Wavell was unaware of the coming identity between his third year and Philip's. It is of such hallowed repetition that the eternal newness of Oxford is composed.

Jack Cartwright had trod the different but equally beaten path to social eminence. He was now the typical college blood, noisy, expansive, varying in dress from dazzling perfection to studied shabbiness. The dons were his slaves ;

HYSSOP

schools his doormat. He lived on the right staircase, sat at the right table when he deigned to dine in hall, flashed about Oxford in the right cars belonging to the right Jews and used by the right Gentiles. His rowing blue was certain; his fabled sweethearts a yearning crowd. He came often to see Philip but Philip never went to see him. Jack's friends and Jack himself were seldom to be found at home.

In other colleges affairs had run the same course. Vardon would rule the Union this term. No one had a chance against him. He would then withdraw, savagely determined, into the museum-like confusion of his Garibaldian lodgings and prepare for his inexorable, inevitable First. Pumblechook had gone bankrupt for the sixth and last time, sold all his books to pay half the cost of buying them, forsworn Gothic and William Morris and gone to live in fussy little rooms in the Iffley Road. He could be seen sometimes, stalking gloomily about the neighbourhood, muttering mediæval oaths and whirling his stiek about his head. Tamworth, now that time for work had really arrived, entirely abandoned it and became, after his lights, frivolous. That is to say, he read all Hume's works and Buckle's "History of Civilisation," went to a picture house every time the films changed, and grew a moustache. He was even suspected of dallying with an Oxford maiden; and he was actually seen cleaning his pipe with a hairpin, a piece of corroborative

THE FLOWER SHOP

evidence that everyone, except Vardon, agreed was damning. His cat disappeared from his lodgings one evening after Laddie had been in to tea with Moses. Suspicion was dark, but conviction impossible. Moses had no conscience and assumed threats to be a form of game. The word "cats" left him supine. Fortunately Tamworth seemed rather relieved than otherwise at his loss, and the investigation was not pushed very far. Douglas Field, being Philip's contemporary, alone was fairly normal. But reverie and the Catholic Church had grown upon him. He looked more and more etherealised and published some verses on the little towns of southern France.

The Sepoys held occasional meetings, but as his fellow-founders fell away at the call of schools, Philip got lax in his attendance. Wavell took the society in hand and ruled it in his lazy, contemptuous way with a rod of irony.

So by the gradual and time-honoured process of readjustment, Philip's third year slipped into a new groove and moved on its all too rapid way. One ritual was established that held its own undisturbed. Every few days he made a point of visiting the flower shop and having a word or two with Daisy. She was natural and sweet-natured and the two became good friends. Throughout the winter term he never saw Burkett either in or near the shop.

Burkett was a man whom attempted description always wrongs. He had none of the

H Y S S O P

consistent wickedness of the villain. He was a fine rugger forward, a first-rate boon companion and came of a good stock. He belonged to a set which was essentially inter-collegiate. Its members were all young men who had terrorised Lower Fifths or Fifths at School, in which scholastic obscurity their athletic prowess had allowed them to remain beyond the super-annuation limit of ordinary mortals. They dined a good deal at the "Clarry" and wore large flat tweed caps very much over one eye. Wallace was contemptuous of them as a Varsity group but tolerated and even welcomed Burkett, the only representative within its walls, as a good fellow and an asset to the football team. His private distractions were his own affair and he never forced them on the college notice. He had prominent relations and his friends in London were, as the provincial papers say, "well known in society." Further, it might not be too much to say that Wallace, in her intellectual pride and super-fleshly pose, felt a secret satisfaction she would rather have perished than admit, in claiming as one of her members, a rake so distinguished as Burkett, whose exploits were nearly as well known in London as in Oxford.

Had Philip not chanced to be present on that occasion a year ago when Laddie had given his opinion of Burkett as a social influence, he might never have considered him at all. His interests and his friends were utterly different to Burkett's ;

THE FLOWER SHOP

only on the rugger field did they ever see each other near by, and then an occasional exchange of remarks was all their intercourse. Certain it was that Burkett was as oblivious of Philip and his very existence as one member of a college can be of another. That he was in any way being watched, by a third-year man he hardly knew by sight, never occurred to him. He lived in blatant lodgings in Beaumont Street with a knot of friends from other colleges and made a pretence of working for schools. "Honours" was a Wallace rule, and there were those who asked how Burkett came to be admitted at all. Gossip whispered in reply that "his aunt . . . Lady Tilbury . . . fascinating woman . . . susceptible authorities." In any case there he was and by considerable skill he had won another year's respite from schools on the plea that outside interests had baulked his work. And Beaumont Street was to be the scene of his last three studious terms.

Continued absence of any cause for suspicion lulled Philip's fears and a little decreased his watchfulness. The Easter term was half-way through when, speeding up the Cornmarket in a motor with several others on their way to a "drag," he thought he caught a glimpse of Burkett's friend Fielding coming out of Daisy's shop. He could not stop and the glimpse was only momentary. But, though he laughed at himself for being foolishly suspicious and even admitted that Fielding had, after all, a perfect

right to buy flowers if he wanted to, the incident worried him rather, and he restored something like the old regularity of his visits. But nothing happened to reward or justify his vigilance.

The Easter term wore away and three weeks of the summer one that followed. One perfect day in the fourth week Philip had paddled himself up the Cherwell in a canoe. He was lying, propped up with cushions, his boat moored in the little inlet between the trunk of a protruding willow and the flower-scented meadow bank, trying to fix his mind on a problem of logic. But the distracting beauties of early summer on an Oxford river were continually getting the better of him. Tall meadow-sweet nodded in the hedgerow of the field, irises and great marsh marigolds shone almost within his reach. The sunlight wove countless threads of misty gold over the distant view. He watched a water-rat under the sandy overhang of the opposite bank. The little animal had clambered out of the river on to a clump of broken reeds; his fur looked perfectly dry and fluffy, only a drop of water here and there showing that he had been in the stream at all; perched on his hind quarters, he held a piece of reed between his front paws, as a squirrel does, gnawing at it with strange little jerks, and between every bite listening intently, his head cocked on one side, his eyes like bits of glistening jet. For several minutes the animal sat unconscious of his observer. Philip moved not a muscle. Suddenly, however,

THE FLOWER SHOP

the rat cocked his head more keenly than usual and dived out of sight. Not for a moment did Philip understand the cause of alarm, but then the distant noise of a boat came to his ears. He lay perfectly still. The succession of gentle splashes, followed by lingering ripples of sound, told him that a punt was approaching from the direction entirely hidden to his view by the outstanding willow. The boat drew nearer; he heard voices. But as he was preparing to see it surge into his sight, a slight jar on the further side of the willow told him the occupants of the boat had put in to shore and were even now tying up not a yard from where he lay. Vaguely irritated at the presence of anyone else in his idyllic solitude, he bent his eyes once more on his book and for a few minutes followed closely the windings of the argument. A familiar voice from the other side of the willow roused him suddenly :

“Done with you, by Jove! You’ll lose your money. I’m half ashamed to rob you.”

“Don’t worry about that, old man. You aren’t quite irresistible perhaps—and the fair Daisy is not ordinary game.”

“That’s just the fun of it. I’m tired of those kids that make all the running themselves. No—I’ve gone ahead well this term, and, as I say, that week at the beginning of the vac. will do the trick. My cousin, Graham St. George—you know Goring’s secretary—will be up staying with me, and he’s the devil with the girls.”

H Y S S O P

"Better take care he doesn't cut you out, Arthur. I don't pay up if *he* gets there you know."

"If I wasn't alive to that risk I should be betting on a certainty, my dear chap. I'll have to work it. That's where the skill comes in."

Philip lay as though turned to stone. A terrible fear possessed him that he knew what those men were talking about "Daisy"—"not ordinary game"—but there were others of course. The fear would not leave him. The sneering affrontery of Burkett's last remarks was unforgettable. He tried to fight down his suspicions. He even told himself that he was eavesdropping, that it was none of his business, that he ought to paddle out of his inlet and away. But somehow he could not move. He wanted to hear more. The talk beyond the willow moved to other things—Burkett's prowess on last term's Boat Race night, prospects of Henley. Then someone laughed suddenly.

"What's the joke?" a voice enquired.

"I suddenly wondered what the hell Arthur did with all the flowers he must have had to buy!"

A general laugh followed. Burkett exclaimed that the difficulty and expense were worth it in view of the prize. He went on to expatiate with brutal suggestiveness on the prize's attractions. Philip felt suddenly sick with disgust and a kind of terror. He felt little doubt of the speaker's meaning. Throwing his book into the

THE FLOWER SHOP

bottom of the canoe, he pushed off into mid-stream and paddled as hard as he could go in the direction opposite to that from which the punt had come. He could not bring himself to pass the boat immediately. Several reaches further up he put in again and landed. For a while he paced up and down the field trying to think what he could do. It was no use threatening Burkett. To begin with nothing had happened yet ; further, he wasn't sure, except in his own instinctive way, that his suspicions were just ; and finally he had overheard a private conversation, and had no shadow of right to interfere. It was equally difficult to speak to Daisy. If it wasn't she at all who was in question he would merely appear as blundering and officious. Even if she was the Daisy they had spoken of, it was no more his business than anyone else's to talk to her about it. He felt powerless, but every moment the imperative need for something to be done impressed itself upon him more forcibly than ever. At last he got into his boat again and paddled back to Oxford. He noticed as he passed the willow where he had been moored previously, that the punt had gone. Arrived at Wallace, he bathed and changed and went round to see Laddie.

He found his friend, in shirt-sleeves, with his feet out of the window, hard at work. Laddie was within three weeks of schools and desperately busy. In a week he was leaving Oxford for a short holiday before the examination.

H Y S S O P

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, Laddie," said Philip, "but it's very important."

He related the adventure of the afternoon and the problem of the next move. When he had done, Laddie sat silent, gazing out of the window, his pipe, dead between his teeth. Then he sighed.

"Damned awkward, Phil. But you'll have to speak to Daisy and risk it. Try and get some confirmation first if you can; watch for Burkett in there and so on. Then take your chance. I wish I could do it for you, but I'm even less concerned now than you are, and, you know, I can't knock off at this point to take up anything that would fill my mind as that would. I've a pile to do. It seems I know less every day."

"Of course you mustn't think about it at all," replied Philip, "I only wanted your opinion. I suppose you're right, but I don't like the job. I'll sleep on it and see how I feel to-morrow."

And he left the lodgings and walked slowly back to college.

For days he brooded over the course he ought to pursue. The term was running rapidly to an end. "That week at the beginning of the vac. will do the trick"—the words haunted him. He even thought of staying up himself after term, but he realised that would do no good, besides upsetting his plan to go abroad immediately with Jack Cartwright. And if he put his journey off, Jack would wonder why, and once

THE FLOWER SHOP

he got to know, the whole world would know and it would be the end of everything. Burkett would only take his revenge on Philip, and defer his triumph to a later date. At last he steeled himself to the ordeal and went steadily towards the flower shop. When he entered, the shop seemed empty. But the next moment Daisy appeared from behind a great stand of ferns and greeted him gently as ever. Philip returned the greeting and feigned a close examination of a collection of irises. He had heard someone move behind the ferns ; he was certain of it. From the irises he wandered back into the shop to a point from where he could see the other side of the central flower-stand. Examining some white lilies in pots was Burkett. He nodded coolly to Philip, picked up one of the plants and said :

“ I’ll have this one. Send it along, will you ? ” Then paid his money and left the shop. All Philip’s awkwardness and fear of blundering returned to him. But he got some control of himself, came round the stand again to see that the shop was empty and faced Daisy.

“ Daisy,” he said, “ I don’t want to be impertinent, but that man is a bad lot. Please don’t have anything to do with him or his friends.”

She flushed deeply and drew herself up almost haughtily, looking away into the street. For a moment there was silence, and then her gentle look returned, though her face was still flaming.

HYSSOP

“ You are very kind, Mr. Murray, and thank you. But I can look after myself.”

Feeling as though he had been slapped across the face Philip mumbled an apology and fled from the shop. He experienced a blended sensation of shame and anger. He had been presumptuous and impertinent and she had put him in his place. All the same he had done right, had told her the truth, and she had refused to listen to him. Not all his long acquaintanceship with her had won him a moment's hearing. He felt humiliated. The shop should never see him again ; he had done what he could.

His wounded sensitiveness did not heal easily. He had forced himself to act, had thrown off with an effort his diffidence and tendency to leave alone the affairs of others, and his well-meant attempt had met with a deliberate snub. He saw Laddie for a moment just before the latter went away, and replied rather curtly, to an enquiry as to the result of his mission, that he had been rebuffed and would do no more. Laddie held his hansom back for three minutes while he called Philip names on the foot-walk. But exhortations to swallow his pride and not behave like a child only made him the more obstinate, and for the rest of the term he hardly went down the Cornmarket at all, much less anywhere near the Johnson flower shop. Laddie came up for his schools and when they were over, he and Philip had an evening of conversation, the last they could have as members of

THE FLOWER SHOP

one college. Laddie tried to bring the talk round to Daisy, but Philip parried him every time, deliberately speaking with solemn sentimentality of the affecting occasion of the last hour of college life, a mood which always exasperated Laddie particularly. Finally, by mutual if unspoken consent, they abandoned the past and present and discussed only the future. Laddie was going to try his fortunes in journalism and painting. He had several friends who would help him, and work written during his Oxford career had attracted the attention of a London editor as possessing vigour and originality.

“Where are you going with Jack, Philip?”

“Well—we’re thinking of going to Paris till about the 6th of July—my mother is at Fontainebleau just now, you know—and then by slow stages to Switzerland—so as to arrive there by the 13th or 14th. I want to stop at Dijon and in the Jura for a little while. In Switzerland we’re going to Argentière to start with.”

“Climbing?”

“’M. Of course it’s early rather and depends on the season. But if the Aiguilles are impossible we’ll move over into glacier land until the rock clears. Then I come home or go with my mother to Italy, if she goes. I shall end up with Trip’s reading party. Got to work next year, like anything.”

Late in the evening they parted.

“Well, good-bye, old thing. We’ll meet in town. I shall miss you next year.”

HYSSOP

“Not you, Phil. But it’s a bore not to be coming back. Good-bye. And will you try and forgive Daisy the snub by next autumn?”

Philip flushed a little.

“Oh, all right I’ll try.”

But things were to happen between then and October to put Daisy completely out of his mind for the time being; and to give him more than enough occupation for the spare moments of his last year.

Chapter Six

SNOW AND FIRE

I

THE vast gulf of Dijon station was chill and misty. The arc lamps threw small inelastic blotches of light on to the dusty space of platform immediately within their range, but around and above obstinate, smoky shadows lowered and drooped. The great building was nearly empty. A sleepy ticket-collector lounged at the entrance, a small group of blue-coated porters, seated on a luggage truck, played a desultory game with greasy cards. Paper, rubbish of every kind, strewn the platforms and the permanent-way. The clock registered after one o'clock. Outside the station, on a hidden siding, could be heard the self-important coughing and shrieking of a freight engine shunting innumerable trucks, each series of snorts being followed by the reverberating crash of buffers, echoing like desultory applause down the loosely connected train of vans and waggons.

Near the door into the buffet, a little pile of bags proclaimed the presence somewhere of

H Y S S O P

travellers; a rug and a golf-bag containing walking-sticks and ice axes leant against the edifice of suit-cases and Gladstones. The door of the buffet opened with a sharp noise and Jack Cartwright sauntered on to the platform. He wore light grey clothes, brown shoes and a soft felt hat; a pipe smouldered between his teeth. He glanced at the clock, then up the line to northwards. The rails gleamed silver till they left the station and were lost in the darkness, and Jack's gaze encountered nothing but the steady unwinking signal lights and, lower down, the small lanterns that marked the points. A step behind him caused him to turn. Philip was smiling at him sleepily.

"No sign?"

Jack shook his head.

"Damned thing's late," he said. "What a godless hour this is to catch a train. Why the hell——"

"Not all over again, Jack dear, please. You'll forgive me when it's all over. But I did want to see that little church and it seemed folly to waste a whole day in the train."

Jack snorted, but his usual good-humour returned the next moment.

"Not a bad-looking girl at the pay-desk, what? Or didn't you notice her?"

"On the contrary I kept a lynx eye on her," replied his friend. "The light in your eye was such that I felt it my duty——"

"Shut up, ass! Ssh—Listen."

SNOW AND FIRE

Both were silent and the next moment a distant roar was heard.

"Here she is." Jack moved towards the luggage and grasped two of the bags.

The roar grew louder. Among the motionless, inhuman galaxy of signal lamps there shone another light, a yellow eye that swayed and glittered ever nearer. A short whistle was followed by the hiss of steam shut off, and a huge bulk of a black engine, its headlight brilliantly yellow, clattered over the home points into the station. It seemed hardly to slacken speed at all as it passed the waiting boys on the platform, but not more than three of its train of dark, swaying cars had gone by before the whole checked suddenly, ran a few yards, and was still. As Philip and Jack advanced towards the nearest corridor entrance the whistle of the pneumatic brakes died away into silence. The station arch echoed with the escaping steam. From various doorways in the building officials had sprung like mushrooms into being. A bell rang violently. Someone with a great voice broke forth :

"Rapide—Dôle—Pontarlier—Vallorbes—Lausanne—Simplon—Milan."

A few passengers trickled out of the train. Down the stuffy corridor stumbled Jack and Philip, peering into fetid and darkened compartments where slumbering forms swathed in rugs sprawled in every attitude, withdrawing hastily from muttered imprecations, peering once more. Finding at last two corner seats

HYSSOP

they hurled their bags on to the rack, unmasked the light (much to the annoyance of a pair of English tourists thus awakened in their window corners), and took off their boots. The creaking train was barely free of the station lights before Jack was asleep. In the now finally darkened compartment, while the tall arc lights, planted like flowers among the sidings near the station, were still winking in between the gaps of the window blinds, Philip, staring into the thus intermittent blackness, heard his sleeplessness taunted by a trio of British snores. As usual in a train, sleep was denied him. He sat, with closed eyes, counting the monotonous beat of the wheels, breaking off every hundred or so to listen for the occasional thud against the rack of the hanging "Horaire," as it swayed with the lurching express. The time went by. A guard passed in the corridor without. Silence again. After a long while a sudden dragging suction checked the speed of the train and it crawled into Dôle. A short wait and they were off again into the night. Philip thought for the thousandth time how much he would miss Laddie. For the thousandth time also his mind veered to the last conversation with Daisy, but the dismissal still rankled and he forced himself to other subjects. He went over the few days in Paris, congratulated himself for not spending one hundred and fifty francs on a luxe edition of Rabelais, blamed his miserable parsimony for leaving one day an autograph copy of "Fêtes

Galantes," which had been sold on his breathless and repentant return the next morning. He recalled the soaring loveliness of Dijon Cathedral, the rosy splendour of the old Burgundian building behind, the peace of late afternoon in the square garden before the hotel, with the long rays of yellow sunlight striking through the trees on to the merry groups of playing children, of white-capped nurses, on to the painted brilliance of the flower-beds. The time slipped away, and when next he opened his eyes the dark spaces of blind opposite were outlined in grey. The grey strengthened and became whiter. The panting of the engine told him they were climbing rapidly. He wondered idly whether they had passed Andelot. Jack still slumbered stertorously in his corner. More time passed before Philip summoned energy enough to slip into the corridor and stand at an open window. The sun was just up, for Philip could see the light touching the higher points of the hill through which the line was winding. The grass and trees had a delicious freshness. Dew glistened on plants and flowers and spangled cobwebs into silver. They crossed a little ravine at the bottom of which a tiny, boisterous stream scurried and chattered. For some while Philip drank in the keen morning air, revelling in its freshness and the sunlit beauty of the hills. Hardly had they left Pontarlier when, having washed as best he might, he roused Jack with the sensational statement that they would be at Vallorbes in

HYSSOP

two ticks. Jack, too sleepy to question his informant's accuracy, leapt to his feet, pulled on his boots and was fully prepared for immediate departure in any direction in little more than a minute. But still the train laboured upwards through the gleaming Jura valleys. When at last they did reach the frontier and stood on the high breezy platform, the grateful rolls and mugs of coffee stopped the flow of Jack's abuse and he commented with gusty violence on the beauty of the view. As they intended staying a day or two at Vallorbes they lounged loftily on the platform, while the crumpled, half-human figures who had crawled from the train at the summons of warm coffee and sunlight struggled back to their compartments, and it was with undisguised pleasure that they watched the dusty snake of coaches writhe slowly out on the southern branch of the acute angle of lines, at the apex of which Vallorbes station stands, leaving, once more unfouled by the filthy smoke of the engine, the shining splendour of the hills. Having watched the train disappear, they seized their bags and sallied forth to find the little inn and breakfast.

The two days had lengthened themselves out to little short of a week, and still Philip and Jack were in the Jura, dreaming away sunny hours in flowery, water-loud ravines, or taking great walks over the higher summits. But their consciences rebuked them for thus lingering on the threshold of the real mountains, and exactly

a week from the time of their arrival found them once more on a brilliant morning on the windy platform at Vallorbes, to take the train that, seven days ago, they had waved joyfully on its way to Lausanne. The grimy monster arrived, its windows fogged with the foul air of the night journey it had made, and the friends made an uneventful and very uncomfortably crowded journey to Martigny. It was a relief to stretch their legs and slake their thirst at a small table under the trees opposite the station. The sun was white on the dusty road ; a waggon drawn by three bullocks and attended by a blue-coated peasant with a whip, crying " hu-uh ! " to his beasts, jolted through the little square ; the distant valley wall shimmered in the heat. The two young men drank their *sirups* and smoked their pipes in perfect contentment. Unanimously they slipped the first train to Argentière and wandered about Martigny sniffing the atmosphere of Switzerland with the silent delight of devout lovers. The Rhone tossed her tawny waters between rows of dusty alders and willows ; a train arrived from Italy and deposited several tourists, an American couple, probably honeymooning, cool, undemonstrative, and an English family consisting of father, mother and innumerable offspring, who were, in unpleasing contrast to their American cousins, very hot and vociferous. Indeed to such an extent did they fill the village with their complaining that Philip, who hated all his countrymen when he

HYSSOP

met them abroad, and Jack, when he discovered by unerring smell that the eldest boy was smoking "straight-cuts," hastened to the mountain line to Chamounix and had not long to wait before they were creeping perilously upwards across the precipitous face of the mountain-side. Once more the customs formality, and at seven o'clock they were on the platform of Argentière. Anxiously they scanned the peaks.

"Rather a lot of snow I'm afraid!" said Jack.

"Yes—there's almost sure to be so early. But we can play about somewhere."

They went to the hotel, where they had wired for rooms, and had long, satisfying baths.

Philip took a last pull at the wine and looked at the sky; then enquiringly at the guide.

Jean shrugged. It might or again it might not. There was wind on the ridge and snow about somewhere. Jean was lean and active. His clear blue eyes shone like a girl's, but his face was brown and lined. He was an old friend of Philip's, had taken him up his first mountain, the Aiguille du Tour, many years ago, and every summer during his boyhood in the Alps Philip had made a point of securing Jean as a companion. They were half-way up the western slope of the Aiguille d'Argentière. Below them the speckled whity grey surface of the Argentière glacier was reached by the long snow slope and belt of broken rock over which they had come.

SNOW AND FIRE

The sky was heavy with unfallen snow ; it was very cold. They had been five days at Argentière and the weather seemed to get worse every day. They had assaulted this peak in despair, going up overnight to the Lognan Inn and starting before dawn. It was now nearly ten o'clock.

"Let's get on," said Jack. "I'm frozen."

They packed the rucksacks with their uneaten provisions and put on the rope, Jean leading, then Jack ; Philip brought up the rear. In silence they began to mount. As they reached the foot of the rocky buttress they saw ominous glistening on the stones ahead, and, turned from the easy path by thoroughly glazed rocks, Jean began to work a toilsome way along the snowy base of the cliff. Progress was very slow. Ice choked the crevasses of the rock, the snow-filled couloirs were hard but brittle. Hours seemed to pass, and the air grew colder and colder. Suddenly a white flake scudded through the air in front of Philip on to Jack's back.

"Jean," he shouted, "it is beginning to snow."

For a quarter of an hour they continued. The snow was now falling heavily. The clouds sagged lower. "It will take us two hours from here," said Jean, "even if we can avoid the wind, and that will not be easy with the rock iced. What will the Messieurs elect to do ?"

After a short consultation they agreed to turn back. They were not yet properly trained to long exposure, and the extreme discomfort

H Y S S O P

and indignity of their present position helped to quiet the promptings of pride, which bade them persist. Retracing their steps they made the chalet path in two hours, and raced home to the hotel by four o'clock, cross, and tired. The night closed in with rain in the valley and they congratulated themselves on having the strength of mind to turn back. But both found such congratulation more forceful as a cloak to a sense of shame than as actual self-expression.

"This is rotten," said Philip gloomily as he and Jack and Jean stood together the next morning on the verandah, watching the gusty rain and the turmoil of cloud that swooped and eddied over the mountain sides, "I vote that we move on. Let's go to the Montenvers to-morrow and over the Col du Géant the first possible day. We can live out this bad spell in Aosta, where it is always sunny, and cross back into Switzerland if it clears. What do you say?"

Jack agreed that anything was better than this, further remarking that he was dead sick of stewed prunes and had read all the novels in the hotel.

They packed rucksacks, arranged for their other things to go to Martigny and wait there, and trudged over to the Montenvers in the rain that same afternoon.

The weather cleared in the night, and the amphitheatre of the Talèfre glacier shone blue and gold as the party came abreast of it on their way up to the Col du Géant at sunrise the fol-

lowing day. Such haste was not agreeable but they had determined to start at the very earliest moment and had routed out into the darkness, unwilling but virtuous, at the summons of the relentless Jean. The amount of snow made the passage of the glacier absurdly easy and it was only one o'clock when they stamped the snow off their boots at the entrance of the Rifugio on the summit of the Col.

The view over Italy was a splendour of misty blue. The velvety quality of distance had, compared to the glittering sparkle of the ice and rock behind and on either side of them, all the richness of pastel contrasted with the brilliant hardness of enamel. Infinite gradations of colour, peacock blues and greens, browns, greys and reds, marked the upward sweep of the Grande Rossère. The Val Ferret smiled as ever the serenity of its welcome. Philip felt a queer little tug at his heart. This first glance revived all his Italian memories, as poignantly as though the most recent of them were only days old instead of nearly a year. Jack recalled him to the present.

There were, for the immediate future, two alternatives. They might plunge forthwith down the zigzags of the Italian side, reaching Courmayeur for an early dinner and bed. Or they might spend their afternoon in an ascent of the Dent du Géant, sleep at the Rifugio and descend to Aosta early the following morning. Eager to achieve at least some summit in their hitherto thwarted season, they decided on the latter

HYSSOP

course, and were, by two o'clock, tramping over the undulating snowfield towards the foot of the rocky tooth which was their goal. The sun was dazzling. Philip remarked to Jack on the probable conditions of their complexions next morning, and Jack, glaring through his blue spectacles at the blinding snowfield, replied that he would rather his whole face peeled off than that they should fail to climb the Dent du Géant; to which Philip agreed that for him also there could be no hesitation between the two alternatives. There being no missiles on a snowfield, except the ice axe one carries and that being too valuable to risk, Jack interpreted the remark with philosophical leniency and the progress continued undisturbed. Their climb was completely unsensational. From stanchion to stanchion, over dizzy glimpses of rock far below, across steep slippery plaques, up narrow chimneys, round corners into apparently void and headachy nothingness they swung and scrambled. A final hoist and they were crowded on the narrow summit, drinking in one of the most amazing panoramas in the world, and piously hoping that a thin and active priest was selected to conduct the annual Mass on that lofty pinnacle.

There was not a cloud in the sky. The Géant glacier swept its jewelled length, a mighty curve of vibrant snow, hedged and broken with warm red slabs and snags of rock, from the wide snowfield of its source, round the buttresses of

SNOW AND FIRE

the Plan and the Charmoz, towards the final séracs of the Montenvers. Mont Blanc, a series of domes, from which to south-eastward ran ridge after ridge of shattered and evil crags, swelled and lowered against the afternoon sky, the rays of the sun striking slanting across the northern slopes gilding their snowy backs, and casting into cold and cruel shadow the ice cliffs which overhang the Brenva. Italy glowed, a land of sensuous, intoxicating colour. Beyond the huddled houses of Courmayeur the valley, its detail veiled in sonorous blue, turned a hill-side and disappeared. They could see the white road curve out of sight on its way to Aosta. It seemed that out of the deep warm valley there rose the very scent of Italy to the proud chastity of the eternal Alps. Range beyond range of mountains stretched to the southward, opalescent, magical.

"What a perfect land," said Philip. "Let's go down to Novara."

"Beastly hot it'll be," returned Jack, "besides we've come to climb and climb we will. I shan't allow you more than a day or two at Aosta among the flesh-pots. Further, I put it to you, do you see me trailing about pavements in Italian towns with nails in my boots and one dirty shirt in a rucksack?"

Philip admitted the force of the reasoning, and sighed, as he pulled at his pipe and tried to catch the shadow line actually moving upwards on the hills directly facing them. The air grew

H Y S S O P

chilly as the sun sank, and Jean suggested the wisdom of return. Darkness was upon them as they entered the Rifugio, their faces tingling and sore, their appetites insistent.

They had the little inn to themselves, and found little attraction in the food-scented air of the stuffy room after their dinner of tinned soup and tough, tasteless meat. Their faces were blistered, their bodies weary. At eight-thirty they sought their murky berths, and after a hasty look for any flea rash enough to be visible at so early an hour, tumbled into bed and asleep.

II

"Courmayeur," said Philip, kicking his feet against the low wall on which they sat and blowing a smoke-ring into the fresh morning sunlight, "is a hole. It is neither Italy nor Switzerland, because it tries to be both. Your face is a caution, Jack."

"And what about yours, Apollo?" returned his friend briskly. "Lucky you aren't going down a glacier. Séracs would fall on you like ninepins, their foundations utterly dissipated. Mine hurts. I hope there's no one I know at Aosta."

"If there is, they'll take care not to know *you*, my son. Bar the possible policeman who may arrest you on sight, you'll have a clear ten yards round you wherever you go."

SNOW AND FIRE

“When the laughter subsided,” said Jack, “the chairman rose and suggested an adjournment for refreshments. What time does the char-à-banc go?”

They returned slowly into the village and found a great red motor standing in front of the chief hotel. Into this they put their sacks, and saying au revoir to Jean climbed in. The guide, having met with an offer, almost immediately on their arrival at Courmayeur, for four days climbing on and about Mont Blanc, had asked Philip if he might accept, and Philip had gladly consented, because he was looking forward to a few days in Aosta before returning to the High Alps, and had been inclined to reproach himself with extravagance in keeping Jean idle during the time. This temporary engagement was a godsend, and it was arranged that Jean should fulfil his four days’ contract and await his two original employers at Martigny, whither they would send him definite word of a rendezvous.

With a breathless shudder of machinery and the wrench of the clutch the char-à-banc started on its way, and was soon gliding fast down the sinuous, dusty road between vivid meadows of dew-spangled grass, towards Aosta and the real Italy.

At midday the car drew up before the Hotel Mont Blanc. Philip and Jack alighted and were welcomed by the landlord with the enthusiasm accorded to the early climber, for, though as the summer goes on, Aosta sees many of the species

HYSSOP

on their way from the Swiss to the Italian Alps, or, as in the present case, making the round from Chamounix to the high centres of Valais, at this early date they were exceptional.

In their joint bedroom they ruefully probed their rucksacks to the bottom, collecting everything clean that could be found therein, and then, after a bath, descended, as respectable as could be managed, to *déjeuner*.

So keen was Philip's delight at being once more on the tiled loggia of the Aosta hotel, that for a few moments he just sat and gazed through the plain broad archways of the colonnade at the blue of the distant hills. He already felt the drunkenness of Italian sunshine creeping over him. He loved every thing, the scarlet flowers on the balustrade, the flies on the ceiling, the tall rods of bread in their glass pot, the haze of dust in the air outside. Silently they began to eat, till footsteps on the loggia behind made them turn. Two women were taking their seats at a table in the corner, obliquely to the left from where Philip sat, but easily in his view. One was a grey-haired lady, vaguely expansive in appearance, wearing one of those curious little black hats assumed by the English tourist as a protest against the immorality prevalent in all countries of the continent of Europe.

The other was a young girl, slight, almost frail in build. From under a wide-brimmed hat a coil of dark-brown hair lay on a white neck. That and her delicate shoulders, hunched a

little as the girl sat with her elbows on the table awaiting the food, were all that Philip could see. She wore a white silk shirt blouse and a dark skirt. A suggestion of ankles and brown shoes in the shadow of the chair told him the skirt was short. "Mother and daughter," he thought. "Looks rather ordinary," was his verdict on the mother. As for the girl he wished he could see her face. What were they doing here? The girl was sensibly dressed for the Alps but surely the mother was no walker. Not in that hat!

Jack talked fairly continuously, often with a full mouth. Philip kept him going:

"Very good indeed. They cook these things splendidly here; I had them before. Does your face hurt?"

"Smarts a bit." Jack suddenly lowered his voice. "Shouldn't be surprised if that's a good-looking girl," he confided, "not half a bad back."

"My dear Jack, you are an authority I cannot dispute. But, alas, the blouse balks the amateur eye. Have you finished?"

"I suppose so," sighed his friend, "there doesn't seem to be anything left to eat."

They got up. As they passed the strangers' table on their way to the door Philip had a glimpse of a grave, rather pale little face and big dark eyes. He refrained from mentioning the subject to Jack who was noisily hastening to his room.

HYSSOP

“ Well, I don’t know about you, Phil, but I’m damned hot and damned sleepy. I’m going to drag this hotel for a novel and lie on the verandah place and read a bit.”

“ I’m going out,” said Phil. “ You won’t let me stay here more than a day or two and I don’t want to waste my precious time over novels.”

“ Oh, all right. Only help me get the things. There’s sure to be some rotten boots or chamber-maid who doesn’t know French or English.”

Philip’s Italian rose to the occasion admirably and he installed Jack with a Tauchnitz, a year-old “ Graphic ” and a long wicker chair on the loggia. A few minutes later he was on the glaring white road that led to the town.

He dawdled over the stream-bed, and into the market-place. The sun glittered and reeled from the walls of the houses. The long book-stall under its dirty awning held him for a minute. Then the fountain, and the gossiping soldiers. He wandered on, enjoying the queer little shops, the innumerable varieties of *pasti*, the brilliant kerchiefs and cheap haberdashery of the Aosta “ nut,” the unabashed vulgarity of coloured post cards, the Italian newspapers, even the leprous, apologetic railway station at the end of a seedy avenue, with the sleepy nose of a train poking out at one end of it. In due time he arrived at the Roman arch on the further side of the town. He was leaning on the parapet of the bridge near by, silently drinking in the heady fascination of Italy, which so thoroughly

pervaded this remote and ancient city when he heard an English voice :

“ Oh ! go away, you little horrors ! Mother, do say something.”

And the reply :

“ Really, Molly, I’ve done all I can. They seem terribly uneducated—or else their manners are at fault.”

Philip turned and saw the luncheon strangers, embarrassed in a miniature mob of dirty children, who were pressing round them with ever increasing shrillness of importunity. On the outskirts of the crowd a hideous old *crétin* croaked a bass to the chorus of mendicancy. In a moment Philip was by the harassed tourists’ side. At the sharp sentence and the necessary gesture the children dispersed sullenly. The venerable cripple leered knowingly and hobbled away. Philip smiled :

“ Had they been bothering you long ? ”

“ It seems a long time,” replied the elder of the rescued ladies. “ I’m sure we’re very much obliged to you.” And she turned to move away.

But the girl began :

“ What was it you said to them ? It sounded very native and it was certainly most effective.”

Philip laughed. As he was explaining he found himself walking slowly by the ladies’ side in the direction of the town.

“ They’re a cute lot,” he concluded, “ they always pretend to be encouraged if they see their

HYSSOP

victims do not know Italian enough to cope with them."

"Didn't we see you at the hotel?" asked the elder woman, playing the only conversational card they had between them. Philip had now seen enough of the girl to be quite determined that the game should not yet come to an end. He took the mother's trick and led a counter-card of his own, which hinted at a general curiosity as to the ladies' plans. They had been at Courmayeur, it seemed, when some dreadful people from somewhere, whom they particularly wished to avoid, had invaded their hotel and driven them away. Aosta was a stage on their flight to Switzerland.

"Our difficulty is," explained the girl, "that we don't know how to get round."

"Luggage, I suppose?" queried Philip.

"Stacks—mother always carries a young ark about with her whenever she leaves England."

"Well, my dear," said the mother, bridling, "I'm sure with these foreign shops and not being able to get a doctor anywhere and goodness knows what kind of food and drains, it's necessary to travel well provided. Especially as you never hesitate to fill my box with the things you can't get in."

The girl's laugh was a delight. Philip wondered how to find out her name. As they traversed the town he related his and Jack's adventures and how they purposed crossing to Switzerland again almost immediately. By the time the

hotel was reached they were talking intimately enough.

"Perhaps — mother," suggested the girl timidly, "Mr.—er—er——"

"Murray," said Philip promptly.

"Mr. Murray would like some tea?"

"Of course—it would be very nice."—"Very many thanks . . . in about ten minutes?"—"No. 32."—"That will be delightful . . . thank you. . . ." They parted. Suddenly inspired, Philip hastened to the office. No. 32 was allotted to Mrs. Wake; the rooms on either side were in the same name. Thus fortified he went upstairs to wash. A glimpse of Jack asleep on the loggia relieved him of one anxiety. In a few minutes he knocked at the door of No. 32. It was a private sitting-room of a proudly uncomfortable nature; plainly a bedroom all too recently converted. Everything seemed to be an advertisement of something. Even the pictures on the walls celebrated the charms of such a hotel, such a mineral water. Mrs. Wake was eminently of those who never travel without provisions for tea-making and the sight of the brioche which had been purchased on the way home, now set out on an enamelled tin plate, was thoroughly in character. The meal was soon in full swing. Philip tackled the problem of luggage and departure. With secret amusement at the thought of Jack's comments on the plan, he persuaded Mrs. Wake that the walk over the Col de la Fenêtre was easy and beautiful; that

H Y S S O P

a mule would carry a sufficient selection of luggage (and even the weary walker if necessary) while the Italian State Railways conveyed the rest round in their own leisurely but inimitable manner. The great advantage of this plan, he insisted, was that it would checkmate utterly the undesirables at Courmayeur who would inevitably conclude that the Wakes had either themselves gone by rail or over the Grand St. Bernard. Mrs. Wake demurred a little at first but finally yielded to her daughter's persuasion.

"My daughter Margaret," she remarked, "is as persistent as those children you rescued us from."

"More so, mother dear, as I never go away."

And so it was settled.

Jack was violent at first. "Good Lord!" he blustered. "Am I to go trapesing about the Alps with only one shirt and all these women? Phil, you're the limit. How do you know I want to leave here at present at all?"

Philip let him say. He somehow could not use the only certainly unfailing argument, a description of Margaret's attractions. An unwillingness that puzzled him rather, hampered a discussion of anything to do with her. He was curt and unsatisfactory when Jack asked for details of the tea-party. "You were asleep, old thing, looking a picture of innocence and blisters. You shall see everything for yourself at dinner."

The four had coffee together. Margaret smoked,

which pleased Philip very much, especially as Jack, in his zeal to light her cigarette for her, held the match so near that he scorched the tip of her nose. His apologies boomed themselves away in general laughter. With darkness a moon rose and dusted the valley with silver. Philip and Margaret wandered up the road. A black cypress soared into the gleaming darkness. On either side of its dense shadow the dusty road was ivory in the moonlight.

"Isn't it perfect!" sighed the girl and stretched her arms to the scatter of stars. Her slim firm body in its grey dress was faery against the hills. At that moment Philip told himself he adored her. Excitement made him, as always, unexpected.

"How old are you?" he asked suddenly.

She laughed merrily, "Are you going to say that moonlight suits me? It's a fatal compliment."

"I wasn't," he smiled, "but it does all the same—like sunlight and probably rain."

"Probably not," she returned, with emphasis. "I draggle fearfully easily—all ends and tails of hair. I'm twenty-five. How old are you? And my father's got a horse and cart and I've got a doll's house and in our garden we've got an apple tree a hundred years old."

"Now you're rebuking me," he said penitently; "was I fearfully impertinent?"

She simulated ruffled tolerance.

"Well—asking a lady's age . . . it's not considered the topic for casual conversation."

"I'm fearfully sorry." He was absurdly humble.

HYSSOP

Once more her laugh rang out: "I'm not serious. You're quite forgiven. Twenty-five can bear scrutiny still, thank goodness. I must go in now or mother will have fits."

He accompanied her to the hotel door and watched her vanish up the stairs. His reflections, as he turned again and saw the moonbeams feather the tree-tops beyond the meadows, were trite enough and conventional enough, but to him, as to everyone who feels himself slipping into love, they were the most original and exhilarating in the world. Jack's voice dispelled delicious visions, shattered a thousand splendid imaginings.

"Couldn't think where you'd got to. Look here, I've come away without a toothbrush—must have left it at Courmayeur. What am I to do?"

"Go to bed dirty," responded Philip without sympathy. "I shan't lend you mine."

Jack grumbled and began on their new acquaintances. "Not bad at all," he remarked. "She's a pretty little thing, but I like a more robust type; something in the style of——"

"Jack, you must restrain yourself. This is not Oxford. You can't go about Europe yelling a catalogue of female beauties under lady-tourists' windows. It's not done. I'm going to bed."

They went upstairs and exchanged views on the discomfort of sleeping in shirts.

"At least my teeth are clean," commented Philip self-righteously, as he blew out the candle.

III

The days that followed passed for Philip in a haze of wonder. She was more adorable every day. Her quick alternation of childish gaiety and grown-up correctness struck him as intoxicatingly unique. There could not possibly be anyone like her. One moment she was treating him almost maternally, as a "nice boy," the next as the frank and pleasant comrade, the next again and she was truckling to the omniscient male. The walk into Switzerland threatened to be a failure because Jack was plainly determined not to walk alone and to expect him to be satisfied with Mrs. Wake seemed to be hopeless. By great good fortune however the lady turned out to be an amateur of geology, and as fossils were one of Jack's less expensive hobbies, they got fairly launched on their respective reminiscences, Mrs. Wake alternately riding a second mule and walking, Jack trudging along with a pipe in his mouth and sweat pouring off his face. Philip and Margaret preceded them. She had a brother who had been at Cambridge. She supposed Mr. Murray despised Cambridge—Mr. Murray didn't do anything of the sort; he was sure it was quite a jolly place, only . . . He got no further as she laughed aloud. "Oxford men always say that," she said. Philip was annoyed at the suggestion of an extensive Oxford

HYSSOP

acquaintance. Cambridge rivals he had no fear of, they would all be aggressive and have spotty faces. He asked if she had any acquaintances at Wallace. Apparently not. Weren't all Wallace men fearfully clever? He got back at her then. "Girls always say *that*," he said, and they laughed together. Every topic was fruitful of delight. She liked the right shapes of hills and knew about wild flowers. She deferred to him on pictures and Paris. He to her on music and golf. The Cambridge brother was a great golfer, it transpired. Philip felt a bit fed up with the Cambridge brother. Probably he imported friends, also golfers, veritable Apollos in tweed, who carried Margaret's clubs and even showed her new grips. He sheered off from golf to safer, less actual subjects. The day flew past. At Mauvoisin he went to bed her slave.

As for Margaret, she was enjoying herself equally though with less emotion. He was a charming boy and plainly fancied himself in love with her. She was no desperate flirt, but like most girls who know themselves attractive, she appreciated a mirror whether it be a masculine eye or a mere affair of mahogany and glass. Chance had provided the more exciting of the two, it was not for her to grumble. Also she loved the mountains and was a good walker, and her mother palled as a sole companion on a foreign tour. On the top of the col Jack took a snapshot of the other three, and she consciously looked her best and wondered how long Philip

would carry a copy about with him in his pocket-book.

As they sat on a sunny rock the day following their arrival at Mauvoisin, the conversation turned on dancing. Jack was with them and was full of the Wallace ball which was due for next summer. He reproached Philip with dragging him off abroad so soon that Commem., this year, had been impossible for him. Margaret complained that her brother would never take her up to "Mays" now.

"He's very lazy and says he's too busy. You see, when he was up I wanted to go, and he endured it once. But he hates dancing and was fearfully miserable all the time. So I can't insist now, can I?"

Jack impulsively suggested that she ought to come to Commemoration next year, and Philip gasped with excitement at the artless expression of what he had for several minutes been longing but not daring to suggest.

"Of course," Jack went on gustily, "those 'Tab' dances are probably all very well in their way. . . . Oh, I say, I beg your pardon. I forgot your brother. . . . I suppose you like Cambridge best. . . ."

Margaret twinkled at Philip and disclaimed any preference. "I've never been to Oxford you see," she said, "so I can't compare the two."

"I wish you would come," mumbled Philip shyly, feeling he looked an ass and wondering how Jack managed not to.

HYSSOP

"I'd love to," she replied, and for a moment their eyes met, an encounter which embarrassed Philip still more and had a most gratifying effect on Margaret's colour, which deepened ever so little. "But I don't know what mother'd say."

Jack cheerfully asked Mrs. Wake the next time they were all together whether she would bring Miss Wake to the Commemoration balls next year. Philip was aghast at his bravery and hung on the answer. It was pleasantly non-committal.

"Well, we must think about it," and she smiled at her daughter. "Molly will accept I'm sure. But don't the chaperons have to sit up all night?"

Philip trembled at the obstacle which seemed inevitably fatal. A fantastic plan for providing a bed for Mrs. Wake in the Senior Common Room flashed through his mind. Jack, as usual, rose to the occasion.

"Rather not. They all have lovely big arm-chairs and go to sleep as happy as anything. There's a story that once . . ."

Philip's kick stopped the imminent and traditional anecdote of snores that so overbore the band as to transform a gallop into a waltz. The conversation glided into more general channels.

IV

The event that Philip feared was not long delayed. Jack declared on the following day that the weather had definitely taken up and that he had come out to climb. Also he simply must get to his luggage. It was impossible to deny that dawdling in the sun near a mountain inn had not been the object of their journey and that there are limits to the endurance of underclothes, so Philip agreed that they should move on. Jean was wired to take the luggage from its resting-place at Martigny up to Arolla, and expect his messieurs immediately. They said good-bye to the Wakes after dinner that evening ; they would be gone before to-morrow's normal breakfast hour. There was considerable forcing of small talk and nebulous expressions of possible English encounters. Jack seemed to have forgotten all about the Commem. plan and Philip shrank from mentioning it. He irritated Jack all the next day by his listless ill temper. However, a good hard fortnight in the Arolla district, culminating in a victory over the eastern arête of the Dent Blanche, cheered him up, and the memory that had been an aching burden became a stimulus to future action. After all the spare money had gone on Jean and porters, Philip parted from Jack at Paris and from there joined his mother at Fontainebleau. The rest of the vacation passed

H Y S S O P

in the lively company of their French host's large family, old friends of the Murrays who had been accustomed to receive them on protracted visits. This year Mrs. Murray abandoned Italy and accepted the urgent invitation to remain where she was. Laddie came to Paris at the end of September to settle down and Philip spent his final week in his friend's company.

Oxford gave a gloomy greeting. When he arrived in the rain at the High Street digs that he and Jack and two others of Jack's friends were to occupy, he felt the fourth year promised badly indeed. The only consolation was that, being the first to arrive of the four, he could take the best bedroom and the only single sitting-room there was. The others must manage as best they could with the big room on the first floor and the little downstairs dining-room.

Philip gave himself very thoroughly to his work. He hardly went out except to college and to occasional games of rugger. The only social dissipation he allowed himself was a visit to Trips from eleven to twelve every third night. He would lounge in one of the don's big arm-chairs, scowling impressively at too self-confident freshmen, whose noisy gaiety would become forced, then waver, and finally die away as they strolled with assumed nonchalance from the room. Trips would reprove him gently for his uncharitableness and they would take up their desultory, delightful talk where the last invasion had interrupted it.

SNOW AND FIRE

The need for talking of his love affair he satisfied by long and eloquent letters to Laddie who replied with forcible expressions of sympathy and long descriptions of his life of blended art and journalism. Atelier ambitions and "copy" battled in his mind for prominence. He seemed to be making heaps of friends. Each letter urged Philip to chuck the Civil Service and join him. In each reply Philip would recall the existence of Margaret and ask how Laddie expected him to keep her on the proceeds of quartier-lounging. And he would apply himself fiercely to his work, dreaming of a little house in Chelsea and the daily return from the Home Office to Margaret's welcoming kiss.

His grasp of his Greats subjects increased gradually and, having no illusions, he was spared violent periods of depression. Margaret filled his every moment of free reflection. His chief dread was to lose touch with her. Jack's snapshot had proved a good reason for a letter. She had answered simply and pleasantly. He waited a discreet interval, trumped up an excuse, and wrote again. When her silence had nearly convinced him all was over he received a Christmas card from her. Not till the Easter Term was half over did he really face the question of Commemoration. The idea of getting her up had grown until it was an obsession. Jack, of course, had long forgotten Margaret's existence and Philip was thankful that the problem could be dealt with by himself alone. He argued with

HYSSOP

himself from every point of view. Would she be annoyed and refuse? Would her mother be suspicious, even if Margaret herself was willing, and insist on a refusal? Surely that eternal Cambridge brother would have made it clear that an invitation to a Varsity dance was often given on the slenderest provocation, that no one ever saw in such invitations the smallest hint of excessive intimacy. After all it was his own college ball and he might as well ask someone. Schools would be over, thank the Lord. And having got so far, he would realise that at present schools were not over, and would abandon his reasoning and bury himself in his books.

At last he summoned all his courage and wrote both to Mrs. Wake and Margaret. The letters were conversational, almost off-hand. They suggested that "here *was* this old dance and someone might as well turn up, why not they?" As the two envelopes plopped into the pillar-box, he felt that his whole future had gone out of his control. He wished desperately the damned letters had never been written.

Chapter Seven

CRAZY RODS

COMMEMORATION had come and gone. Philip lay in bed and stared at the ceiling; almost unconsciously he watched the streaks of light, which penetrated between the blind and window-frame, dully luminous as they struck across the grey-white of the plaster. Two divergent streaks there were, and then a transverse, blurry one—they reminded him of a picture by one of the Futurists, what was the fellow's name?—the picture in which the incidents and noise of the street forced their way into a room, a thrusting mass of angle and image. Why hadn't he noticed it before?—he often lay awake before sleeping. But usually there were no streaks of daylight to make Futurist pictures on the ceiling—usually it was dark. Of course; it was nearly six in the morning; it had been daylight for hours; why, he remembered, as he had stood at the gate on St. Giles only an hour ago, his surprise that Blanche Stoddart's dress was really blue and not green as it looked early in the evening; and then he saw once more with absolute clearness the grey empty stretch of

HYSSOP

street and from the college gate the sudden out-rush of gaily cloaked girls, of matrons with their grey hair and black spangles, of hot, dishevelled undergraduates. Out over the early morning dignity of St. Giles this motley, dissipated crowd had broken and scattered. Sleepy, but still excited, the little groups of girls, each band clustering round the darker, sleepier figure of the chaperon or escorted by brothers and friends, had hurried out of sight. Philip remembered how detached he had felt, watching the ball break up ; why had he stood alone at the college gate ? He seemed to have been alone all the latter part of the dance.

His mind worked jerkily and confusedly from point to point. Every now and then the cold distinctness of the streaks on the ceiling, the pattern of the wall-paper, the absurd angle at which his crumpled dress-shirt had fallen on the floor, caught and held his half-dazed attention. Then he stumbled on again to the next link in his chain of reconstruction. He had been alone the last part of the dance because—because—Margaret had gone away—had been taken away before the final dance. Margaret, Margaret—he was repeating the name, when his mind, as though frightened at the proximity of such a happiness, swerved away to further reminiscences of the dismal hour after Margaret had gone. He remembered sitting on a sofa in the quad—a sofa of which every shortcoming became doubly evident in the pitiless grey of the morning—smoking

endless cigarettes and listening with hunger in his heart to the throb of the waltz which the band were playing over and over again in the big tent. It was a silly waltz—there was no tune in it—at times the band shrieked and sang—but yet it was a wonderful waltz ; he never wished to dance to a better ; the band had played it off and on all the evening ; they had been playing it when she had pressed her hair against his cheek—once more his mind shrank suddenly away. He forced himself to keep to the chronology of the evening. He was on the sofa, disconsolately smoking cigarettes, and listening to the muffled music in the tent. Wavell came up, cool and sardonic as ever, and sat down next him. They had talked for a little but Philip was in no mood for conversation, and Wavell had departed, telling him kindly his shirt was crumpled and he looked a fright and should have the public spirit to go to bed. What did it matter ? There was no one there he minded—but suppose his shirt had been crumpled while *she* had been there. Had he looked a fright ? Surely he didn't look such a pig as Grant over there, who sweated his way through four or five collars and two shirts an evening ? Then he remembered her hair against his cheek again ; no, it was all right, it must be all right. And yet, if it was all right, why hadn't she said " yes " ? Why had she looked at him with those great wistful eyes and murmured—" Oh, Philip—I can't say now, not now." What a beast he had been ; he ought to have realised she had never

H Y S S O P

thought about him at all, she was startled, irritated, as angry as anyone of her sweet temper could be. But all the same she had called him "Philip" and had said "not now," which was a different thing to "no." And then she had undoubtedly pressed his cheek with her hair during that last dance. Or was it mere accident? They were doing a new Boston—one with a dip in it—and it was difficult to avoid holding one another closely. She had meant nothing, and he, like a fool, had misunderstood and allowed his cheek to rest for a moment on her head. That settled it anyhow; she wouldn't tolerate that. He was a blockhead. He had brought it on himself. His year of scheming and longing had ended in smoke. The summer stretched before him an aimless desert of loneliness. What should he do with himself? Then the soft fragrance of her hair seemed to fill the air. He felt once more the silkiness against his cheek. How he ached to kiss that hair, to run his fingers through the dusky clouds, to bury his face in it. He thought of the white of her neck gleaming through her loosened hair, would he ever have the right to kiss her neck? The thought was almost overwhelming. Once again his mind switched away, this time to the weary months of planning which had preceded the final arrangement of the party for the ball. Her mother did not answer his letters. He recalled the weeks of panic that they would not come after all; that he had been condemned as impertinent, that they would keep him away

from her. He had pictured his tortured and lonely soul, enduring the agonies of the great ball without the thing it had schemed and longed for so long, but nevertheless compelled to gaiety for the sake of other guests. But they had come. At last her mother had written calmly and briefly as if nothing had happened, as if he had never been eating his heart out for a word of reassurance—"Molly and I hope to reach Oxford at 4.30." Molly! would he ever be able to call her that? it seemed the most beautiful name in the world. More beautiful even than Margaret.

He had met them at the station and she had greeted him gravely, with that composure and simplicity which had fascinated him long ago in Italy. He had accompanied them to the house at which they were to stay. How he had striven to talk. He had racked his brains for subjects, but her mother was tired, and Margaret had merely looked at him with those wonderful, candid eyes, answering his questions adequately, but plainly disinclined for conversation. He envied her peaceful power of silence. He had longed above all things to sit and look at her and say nothing. But his nerves were on edge and he had chattered and joked himself through the tea-party and into the street, only to stand there and curse himself for a popinjay and a fool.

The days had gone by somehow. There had been a river picnic, with several other people. Wavell had accompanied them and the punt

HYSSOP

would revolve in a circle, until it was discovered that Margaret's mother's parasol acted as a sail and swung the stern of the boat round. They danced each night, and the third night was that of the Wallace ball.

Here Philip checked himself. He was conscious that his mind was hurrying on. He realised quite clearly, as though his mind was a separate being, that it wanted to get quickly to the climax, that it wanted once more to revel in the thought of Margaret's hair and its perfume. He took a perverse delight in checking this haste. He insisted on tracing each unimportant detail of the early part of the dance. He dwelt deliberately on a conversation with Trixie Waterson's mother, a handsome, clever woman but rather deaf, who insisted on discussing an eminent divine whom she did not know by sight, but who was actually standing a few paces off, in that penetrating tone commonly adopted by deaf people. He forced himself to recall the search for programmes ; how after a long while he discovered Charlie Meyerstein with them, and took two—one for Margaret—and filled in his own name on hers for fourteen or fifteen dances. That was a brave thing to do, by the way, and she hadn't objected. This piece of encouragement cheered him. He hadn't thought of that. In his good humour he forgot his restraining designs on his own thoughts and allowed them to hurry unashamedly to the second dance from the end.

Behind the marquee, on the east side of the

quad, a strip of grass had been left enclosed on one side by the canvas wall of the tent, on the other by the grey stone pile of the neighbouring college. Into this deserted and shadowy spot he had wandered with Margaret, while the violins sobbed out the opening bars of the first encore. He had not been conscious of the direction they had taken, but now as he lay on his back gazing at the streaks of light on the ceiling he felt sure some subtle influence had guided him thither. In any case, as they paused facing each other, he had become suddenly alive to the loneliness of the spot, to the heady beat of the music, to the frail wonder of the little white-clad figure before him, and almost before he knew it, the words had slipped out :

“ I love you, Molly. Will you love me too ? Be my wife, Molly.”

That was all. And she never moved. She merely fixed on him her tremendous eyes, her grave trustful eyes, and for a moment there was silence.

Philip lay for a moment with closed lids, revelling in the delirious suspense of the moment. So clear and vivid was his impression of it, that he felt himself once more standing on the strip of lonely lawn, and saw before him Margaret with her beautiful head poised on her straight slim neck, her fresh young shoulders gleaming against the tremulous background of music and dawn, and, most wonderful of all, her eyes that seemed to look into his very soul. He shuddered

HYSSOP

to think what she found there, what meannesses and evasions, what selfish jealousies, what shattered fragments of ideals.

She had looked at him, and the whiteness of her breast rising and falling rather quickly had thrown one more challenge to the baffled hunger of his lips. Then very quietly and steadily she had asked him to wait, she had asked for a month—no excuse, no reason. He gloried now, even in his misery, that her candid purity had risen above the giving of pretexts. She was asking to be trusted, and Philip felt he would trust her even if she had asked for fifty years. He remembered that his hands had fallen to his sides again. She had made no motion, and he had not presumed to touch her ; if she said he was to wait, he must wait ; she was not the person to yield to caresses ; it would have been an insult to lay a finger on her until she asked him. Slowly they returned to the marquee. He had noticed with a gleam of pallid amusement that the mother had been sitting just the other side of the canvas wall, not three feet from the place where he had thrown his future at the daughter's feet and she had gravely, if provisionally, restored it to him. The dance was not yet over and, his heart in a tumult, he had circled the room the three or four remaining times, his lips parched for hers, his body on fire with the pressure of her loveliness.

And then the last dance but one and the sudden pressure of her hair on his cheek, and once more

he was questioning whether or no it was an accident.

He was entering again on the round of hopes, despairs and longings when he fell suddenly asleep and awoke to the sound of his bedroom door opening to admit Jack Cartwright, swarthy and cheerful and noisy as ever, a pipe between his teeth, an umbrella in his hand.

"Pouring," he said. "Get up, you lazy hound, it's eleven o'clock. Damned lucky the rain kept off till this morning."

And Philip, his dreams and sorrows momentarily dispelled, rolled out of bed and accompanied Jack into the sitting-room.

For the nights of Commemoration Philip was occupying his old rooms in College. They were on the third floor and looked southward the whole length of the quad. His choice had originally been dictated by a joint love of quiet and sunlight, and on bright days he would sit for hours at a time in the angular patch of sunshine, reading or merely watching the varied traffic of a college quadrangle. But the view this morning was utterly dismal, and Philip felt a desolate stirring of the heart, which thrilled as much as it saddened him. Last night there had been music and laughter and soft lights down there. Last night he had stood with Margaret at his side looking along the gleaming ballroom floor, at the little groups of men and girls, gaily conscious of the fact that excitement suited them, and that there was a something specially exciting in a festivity

HYSSOP

held within the monastic walls of a college. And now, below the mists of rain curling about the great trees, was a litter of stacked-up chairs and tables, a few sodden lanterns either hanging forlornly to their posts or fallen to the ground and fouled with mud. In and out of the great tent moved sullen workmen, carrying rugs and palms, hurrying through the rain from the marquee to the drays which stood outside the gate. It was all over. Last night it had seemed that life would always be a dream of love and rhythmic colour. But the magic had proved only illusion, only a fleeting drug to the senses ; Margaret had gone ; in two hours she was leaving Oxford. And the hobnails of the workmen's boots were even now desecrating the smooth and elastic beauty of the ballroom floor.

Half-ashamed of the bathos of this last reflection Philip turned from the window, conscious that he had stood there in silence a curiously long time, and surprised that Jack, with his ever-impatient vitality, had made no remark. The explanation of the silence was immediately forthcoming. Jack was leaning against the mantelpiece and in his hand was a ball programme. His smile was whimsical.

"Wise of you to put only an initial," he said at last, "besides saving the time of writing a name so often—ten, eleven, twelve—fifteen times. My dear Phil, you did go it. And down here, during the last dance but one, there seems to have been a celebration of some kind—there's a cross against

it. I hope, my son, I am not to interpret this symbol in the old, old way?" And he laughed.

Philip was conscious of feeling, and looking very angry. But he had control enough to remember that Jack always read everything of everyone's that he found lying about, and contented himself with inwardly cursing the sentimental impulse that had led him, as he dreamed over his programme before getting into bed, to mark with a cross the dance during which the plunge had been taken. The thing had been done during one of his short periods of confidence and exultation, and he had felt dimly that he was recording a landmark in his life and Margaret's, which, in time to come, would cause them to smile joyfully at one another, and cling together in the secret and splendid sanctity of mutual memories. His mood of the morning brought home to him the folly and sentimentality of the deed. "A landmark in Margaret's life"—good heavens!—she would have forgotten about it in a week, and in a year two or three other similar "landmarks" would have been passed unnoticed by her, and only cherished in the memory of those—his successors!—who had tried in vain to set them up.

He spoke with levity.

"Yes, Jack, the cross means the fifth ice—a record for me. I'm no ice-eater—and, as you say, time-saving in these days excuses even initials. But I want to hear your adventures. Stay and talk to me while I have breakfast."

Philip knew his man, and Jack Cartwright,

HYSSOP

with the candour of a profoundly monogamous Don Juan, launched out into long and naïvely frank confessions of the evening's events. Under the shelter of these avowals, Philip set his coffee to boil and prepared a saucepan for his eggs, and then went into his bedroom to bath and dress. Jack's great voice boomed on in the other room, his rhapsodies punctuated with shouts of laughter and curious little silences.

"Trying to invent something else?" asked Philip, when one of these silences seemed unduly prolonged.

The answer was irrelevant. "I say, Phil, so it *was* that girl we saw in Italy—the one you danced with so much—I couldn't remember where I'd seen her before." Philip's tie received a vicious pull, but he asked evenly enough:

"What have you got hold of now?"

Jack appeared in the bedroom doorway holding in his hand the Italian snapshot. Once more the excesses of last night's optimism were recoiling on Philip's head. He had left the photograph on his desk.

"Yes. She was here last night. I tried to find you, to prove to her that you aren't always so hideous as when she last saw you, but you were inaccessible. As for your insinuation, it's unreasonable. I danced very little with her."

"Liar," replied his friend calmly. "Still, I don't blame you. Very pretty little thing. I suppose I ought to have shown up and done the friendly, only I wasn't sure where I'd seen her, and I really was fearfully occupied you know."

Another laugh and the stream of reminiscence was loose again. Philip knew he was ridiculous to suspect everyone of being impressed with or even at all conscious of his preoccupation with Margaret. What on earth should the rest care? They all had their little Commemoration romances, and here was he feeling like a hero in the midst of spies. He left his bedroom and started eating. The talk drifted on, the rain still fell pitilessly. His meal over, Philip shouted to the scout who had been hovering impatiently for the chance of clearing away, and tilting his feet on the sofa watched his cigarette smoke drifting across the grey-blue of the wall-paper.

"When are you going down?" he asked.

"This afternoon. My mother and sister thought they would be equal to it by four o'clock. I've got to dance at Prince's to-night."

"Again? Good heavens—you're incorrigible."

The conversation languished, Philip sinking back into his old conflict of hope and despair, Jack busily engaged in cleaning out his pipe and emptying the somewhat sensational contents on to the hearth-rug. At last he stood up.

"Well—I'm off to Wilson's to see whether any proofs of the group have come out. Do you want one?"

"No—they rook you vilely and one looks on those occasions just as other people say one does always. I prefer the flattering falsity of my own delusions."

Margaret had gone before the taking of the

HYSSOP

general photograph, which provides the tragicomic ending to college balls. Philip had sulkily allowed himself to be dragged into it, and had perched disconsolately in one corner of the group among other maidenless youths. Who wanted a photograph of other people's girls? And he got off the sofa and stretched wearily. Jack's legs and umbrella could be seen hurrying through the rain. The squalor of the ruins of last night was greater than ever. Some of the floor had been broken up, and through the flapping walls of the half-demolished tent Philip could see dusty grass below the boards, grass that had not received the rain as yet. He looked at his watch. Nearly time to see her off—the train went at one o'clock. The thought of the station made him wince. Three short days ago he had met her there—in sunshine. It seemed a lifetime; and now it was done. Soon he would be watching her train contracting into a mere spot in the distance, carrying with it everything he cared about and leaving him solitary on the rain-swept platform.

He was at the station first. When they at last arrived, Margaret was perfectly composed but looked pale and hollow-eyed. Her mother was sleepy, but quite healthily so. She thanked him for asking them to Oxford. Margaret said nothing. Had she been lying awake? A delicious pang shot through him; but only for a moment. He had startled her and spoilt her night's rest. Her tragic appearance was no tribute to him, rather

an indictment of his selfish thoughtlessness. He felt awkward and wretched. The arrival of the train seemed a salvation. He found them a carriage and stood at the door uttering conventional idiocies about their "not being over-tired" — "have a good journey" — "lucky it was fine last night." The mention of last night confused him still further. He longed for the train to start. Margaret stood at the window looking at him now and then with her wistful, appealing eyes. He noticed that one finger of her left glove wanted mending; a corner of white skin showed through. Supposing he kissed it? The consequence which struck him immediately was that the rain, dripping from the roof-ledge of the railway carriage, would go down his neck. He shivered and wrenched his eyes away from the white morsel of finger. Suddenly there was a whistle and the train began to move. He stepped back and raised his hat. Margaret's mother nodded amiably, and then a tremendous thing happened. Margaret leant well out of the window (even as she did so his absurd mind wondered whether the rain drops were going down her neck; he envied them) and smiled into his eyes. The moment recalled a sunny Swiss rock a year ago. He felt himself blushing scarlet, smiling foolishly in return. The train gathered speed, Margaret withdrew her head and he watched the last coach drawing away, sublimely unconscious of the rain that fell on his still uncovered head.

Chapter Eight

THE GIRL DEBATES

I

THE journey north was for Margaret a welcome time of reflection. The train rambled modestly on its way with the diffidence of a poor relation spending a lifetime in visits. It was one of those cross-country trains that run over various systems and are the first to suffer by any variation in the time-tables of their hosts. Speed and punctuality being unattainable, it was a comfortable if aimless train to travel by, and its quiet rumble gave Margaret a sense of physical repose, of which she was in sore need.

Her principal sensation was one of annoyance with herself. She had felt this almost the moment she had left the gate of Wallace in the early morning and it had grown upon her steadily. She had behaved like a fool and a schoolgirl. It wasn't even as if it was her first proposal (at least not technically, though after all poor Dick Sheldon's effort had been hardly serious). And suppose it had been, it was no reason to stand stock still like a tree-trunk and say nothing. It wasn't even as if she mightn't have foreseen its

THE GIRL DEBATES

happening. This was her real mistake. She had had warnings and warnings. Probably she ought to have realised at Aosta how serious the boy was. She had played with it all along instead of taking the matter in hand. And now this had happened. He had taken her by surprise. Well, that wasn't his fault ; he'd given indications enough for any one who wasn't a blockhead. And that wasn't all. Not content with being blind, she had finished with a quite unnecessary piece of cruelty. Of course there was no question of the ultimate answer, the answer she ought to have given on the spot. What had possessed her ? Partly his pitiful eagerness. He had looked terribly anxious—just for a moment—after the fire had gone from his eyes. Still—that was no reason for shirking it, and that was the only word. She had shirked it. She was a coward, a coward and a beast. And it would have to be done just the same, only it would hurt him infinitely more. She winced as she remembered his tired look on the platform. Even to the end she had blundered ; her last look which had, in a muddled sort of way, meant to be sympathy had been interpreted as encouragement. “ Good heavens,” she thought, “ what a pig I am.”

Her mind, revolving in circles as Philip's had done, came round once more to her obtuseness in the past. His persistence in writing, the invitation to Commem., his manner when they arrived—each and every one ample indication, ample presage. She began to wish she had never seen him at all, for pity was now her paramount

HYSSOP

emotion. She wilfully pictured him in extremes of despair. Perhaps she would have to marry him to save his life. How absurd! But all the same he was queer and intense about it. What a fool she had been! "Thank the Lord mother is asleep," she thought. "It would be talk, talk, if she was awake." She wished she could sleep. Her skin felt dry and sore; her brain uneasily tired. The time slipped by and she sat gazing out of the window, at the sodden fields and the dripping woods, lost in fruitless regrets. It did not make her thoughts any the more pleasant that the moment of the proposal had been undeniably thrilling. Every now and then the memory came back to her of the leap her heart had given, of the strange emotion a blend of shame, alarm and triumph that had possessed her as she saw the passion for her beauty flaming in his eyes. And she reproached herself once more for her hesitation and her folly.

Still Mrs. Wake slept. Only as they were toiling up the hill from Chesterfield did she stir, open her eyes and smile mistily at her daughter.

"I must have been to sleep."

Margaret started. "The best thing you could have done, dear," she said, "you must be tired out sitting night after night till goodness knows when, watching me dance. Let's have some tea."

Tea ordered, they discussed the weather languidly and whether Lionel would be at home when they arrived.

"He spoke of bringing a friend back for a few

THE GIRL DEBATES

days," Mrs. Wake said. The tea was reviving her. "I do hope he'll be presentable. Lionel gets hold of the queerest people, and seems to think that a profound knowledge of motor-cars or golf can compensate me for dirty nails or ruined tablecloths. Do you remember that amazing Mr. Stetson? What was he?—gardener or a painter—I forget which—something to do with landscape. I only know that he *would* make puns and always said 'you bet' when I asked him if he would like to be taken anywhere. Very dreary and rather impertinent."

Arrival at Sheffield put a temporary end to Mrs. Wake's reflections, but Margaret was annoyed to find that instead of relapsing into silence when they had changed trains and were off again, her mother began briskly on the one subject she wished to avoid.

"A nice boy—Philip Murray. Curious how chance meetings abroad develop. Perhaps he is a little too gentle—but that may be youth. I like masterful men. I remember your father saying that when we were engaged I was always more affectionate when he was angry. But then as he is the mildest-tempered man imaginable the remark is curiously free from passionate imputation. The undergraduates manage to behave quite like grown-up people at these dances. Possibly they fancy themselves in love sometimes. There were a lot of silly girls simpering round; I was so relieved to feel that you were old enough to be sensible."

HYSSOP

Margaret said nothing, but prayed inwardly she didn't look the worm she felt. Mrs. Wake stroked down her skirt on which a few crumbs still lingered. Her daughter's silence annoyed her a little.

"You're very glum, Molly, and you look tired. I hope to goodness that boy has not been bothering you with sentimentalities."

"He asked me to marry him last night," said Margaret quietly.

"My dear!" Mrs. Wake stared at her daughter. "I never heard of such a thing! The idea!"

She was genuinely surprised. Like her daughter she had seen only a passing fancy in Philip's evident attraction to Margaret, and in going to Oxford she had never considered risking any such definite outburst as this. Of course he was not so serious as he thought. How tiresome of him and how impertinent! Mrs. Wake snorted. "Preposterous. I hope you put him in his place."

Margaret had turned to the window again and seemed lost in contemplation of the landscape. She made no reply.

"I do wish, my dear," said Mrs. Wake peevishly, "you'd answer when I speak to you. I suppose you treated as it deserved this foolishness. Of course I know he doesn't know his own mind, but it was unchivalrous and I shouldn't have thought it of him. Taking advantage——"

"Don't, mother. He meant it absolutely, and if I can't say 'yes'——"

"Can't say yes!" almost shouted Mrs. Wake.

THE GIRL DEBATES

“Good heavens, child, of course you can’t say yes! What on earth do you mean? What did you say to him?”

“I behaved very badly, mother,” said Margaret quietly. “I have blamed myself ever since. But somehow it seemed so brutal and now I don’t know——”

Mrs. Wake was by now rather alarmed.

“What did you say?” she insisted.

“I said I’d let him know in a month.”

“You shall write to-morrow, my dear, or I shall,” concluded her mother grimly.

“Nonsense, mother, I shan’t do anything of the sort, and if you do a thing I shall never forgive you. He made no attempt to press me. I almost loved him for trusting me.” Her voice softened. “And you will trust me too, dear, won’t you? Don’t worry. I shall make up my mind and I’ll tell you all about it before I write to him. But at present I’ve got to clear up by myself the muddle I’ve made.”

The rest of the journey passed in silence. In the echoing turmoil of the Leeds station they were greeted by a square and vigorous young man in grey flannel trousers and a shooting-jacket. Lionel Wake was like his sister in expression and had the same clear, unshrinking eyes. But his hair was lighter brown and his features had not that almost ethereal serenity which gave Margaret the pale brilliance of a flower. He greeted his mother affectionately, kissed his sister on the ear and plunged into the

HYSSOP

mêlée round the luggage van. Not until they were in the motor and on the way to Chapel Allerton was there chance for conversation.

"Must be tired, aren't you? Remember I was nearly dead the only May week I really went in for. But I dare say those Oxford dances are too refined to be very exhausting. Lot of fellows there wouldn't dare to hop round much for fear of appearing strenuous and spoiling the parting in their hair. Enjoyed it, Molly? Any proposals? Your hair's the wrong shade for nowadays—though no doubt it's ultra-modern in Oxford. What did they dance? Quadrilles?"

He rattled on.

"Yes, I got home yesterday. Brought Graham St. George with me for a night or two—or to be more exact he brought me. You needn't look so alarmed, mother. He's ultra-presentable. You must have heard of him—Goring's secretary, you know? I got to know him well through some legal business we did for him. We motored up from London. He's got a ripping new car which he wants to try on some of our Yorkshire hills. So we're off on Saturday or Monday for a week's trip round the country. Then I'll come back and take another week at home before going back. It seemed a chance to get a holiday in June. Old Murdoch is rebuilding in August or something, so doesn't want to go away till then and gave me the opportunity of getting off earlier than usual."

The Wakes lived in one of those dignified stone houses, built at the end of the eighteenth century

THE GIRL DEBATES

near the big towns created by the Industrial Revolution. They were not rich people in the sense of the day, but were comfortably off, Mr. Wake spending his time in golf, church politics and horticulture. Lionel worked in a flourishing lawyer's firm in London, of which he had recently become junior partner. He was four years older than Margaret and still pretended sometimes to treat her as a child.

It being half-past six when they reached home, Mrs. Wake and her daughter went straight upstairs to rest and dress before an eight o'clock dinner. Margaret was gradually accustoming herself to the problem before her. She determined to face it squarely at last and with an open mind. There was no doubt in her mind of Philip's sincerity. In the light of his declaration she saw a hundred little indications, previous to last night, that showed him to be living entirely in his love for her. She was touched and excited by his devotion. He was nice-looking and intelligent; he had more ideas and fewer prejudices than the average young man she had met, than Lionel's friends for instance, or even dear old Lionel himself. But she knew she didn't love him—at least not yet. She felt, however, what she had never felt before, a nascent love for love. Love no longer meant heroics, or limelight languishings. It had become something immense, enthralling in its possibilities alike of wonder and comfort. She felt as though Philip had shown her a golden ladder and bid her climb. She was eager now to

climb, but with every moment of eagerness came more surely the conviction that it was not he that would greet her in the heaven she would reach. In the present trough of her remorse for the pain she had given him and the still greater pain she would give if the answer could not be the one he longed for, she consciously wanted to love him. He had shown her the path to love and she owed him some return. But the next instant she knew that love cannot bargain. If this was to be her feeling for a month, or even for a week, there could be no two ways of ending the matter. Putting the problem now resolutely out of her mind she went down to dinner.

As she entered the drawing-room she saw Lionel and another man standing over by the piano. At her step they turned, and Lionel said :

“ Molly, this is Mr. St. George.

“ St. George, let me introduce my sister.”

Graham St. George was rather more than thirty years of age. He was tall and loosely built. His clearly cut, rather square face, hard grey eyes and close brown hair gave him an air of strength and courage. With ease and confidence he began to talk of Oxford and dances. He explained that his chief's illness had set him free for the moment and that Lionel's opportune release had suggested the motor trip, and the present visit to Leeds. He seemed to know Lionel well, and Margaret saw her brother's liking and admiration for his friend.

Dinner passed cheerfully, St. George charming

THE GIRL DEBATES

Mrs. Wake with his humour and delightful manners, and Mr. Wake with his knowledge of golf and opinions on Disestablishment. As she went up to bed Margaret thought him quite the nicest of the friends Lionel had brought to Chapel Allerton, and she was grateful to him for the tact and skill with which he had surmounted the subtle difficulties of a family reunion at which he was the only stranger.

II

When the ladies and Mr. Wake had retired, Graham fell in with Lionel's suggestion of a game of billiards. They played in a desultory fashion till close on midnight, and adjourned to the library for a drink. His whiskey finished, Lionel walked to the door.

"Think I'll turn in," he said, "it's after twelve. Are you coming up?"

"Not this minute—I'll just sit up another hour or so and do some letters. Yes—I'll put it out. Good night."

When Lionel had left the room, St. George crossed the library to the writing-table and selected a sheet of paper. About to begin his letter he remembered his pipe was on the hearth stool. He sat for a minute while he filled it. The house was very still. In the corner of the rather sombre room a tall clock gurgled quietly; shadows

H Y S S O P

crouched in the corners ; only the portable lamp on the desk threw a circle of light over the litter of papers ; the rich tones of curtain and carpet, the shelves of darkly bound books, the massive solemnity of the furniture brooded in peaceful harmony.

Graham sat back in a huge arm-chair, absently pressing the tobacco into his pipe bowl, his eyes staring into the empty grate.

The grandson of a nobleman, he had in his veins the blood of an old and proud family. His ideas, his amusements, his conventions were those of a ruling caste. He was wealthy but no idler, working hard and with ability as private secretary to a Cabinet Minister. He read the right books and knew the right people. Eccentricity he deplored, but recognised the existence of genius and never failed to follow intelligent changes of idea whether in politics, religion or art. His code allowed of moderate indulgence in the chief elements of luxury. His friends were for the most part no social moralists. But he and they upheld certain rigidities as essential to order and decency, and trusted to good breeding to discriminate between things that were done and things that were not done. He had seen a good deal of life in various ways. He was neither impetuous nor quixotic. And yet, to his horror, he felt stealing over him the certainty that he was in love with Margaret Wake. He could hardly bring himself to admit it, but in his heart he knew it was true.

THE GIRL DEBATES

He had seen more beautiful girls, and more accomplished ones. He had always been a favourite with women, had been familiar with many, had thought to love one or two. But this was different. This was the real thing. Every moment of thought made him more certain. He called up her image in the caressing gloom of the library. Her transparent brilliance dazzled him. The women of his world shone from without ; this girl seemed to radiate light from her very soul. Her purity was balm to him ; the purity of so many young girls was sheer ignorance ; they were merely children in long frocks ; they were transcending nothing because they knew of nothing to transcend. But Margaret was at once as young and older than these. She was serene, but her heart was eager ; she was pure, but her purity was her nature and not merely negative. Graham reasoned with himself. It was precisely four hours since he had first seen this girl, and he was thinking himself in love with her. Not thinking though—he was in love with her. And even as his conventional self denied that love at first sight existed, a new disquieting self made a sudden determination to win her. She should accompany them on the motor trip. If this couldn't be managed the motor trip should be abandoned. He amazed himself by his quick and methodical reflections. After his visit to the Wakes it might be difficult to see Margaret again. They seldom came to London, their tastes and amusements were different from his. He never

HYSSOP

paused to consider that such differences might make a marriage with Margaret a failure. He only knew that life without her would be a failure still more dismal. He realised that his task was not an easy one. He had at the outside a fortnight with her in which to make her love him. But he never thought of not succeeding. He knew his own powers and besides—he loved her, and a man who loves a woman just tries to win her love in return, and failing that goes and takes her without it. Love would come. He had enough for two and to spare.

And he sat on in the shadows of the library, more fiercely determined, more triumphantly happy than he had ever been before. The matter was now as good as done. He saw himself as her husband. He felt her body against his, his lips in the cloudy glory of her hair.

Upstairs, that same hair surrounding her beautiful face like a halo, Margaret slept and dreamed of love. But in her dreams though her lover's face was veiled in mist, his hands were not the hands of Philip Murray.

Chapter Nine

THE MAN DECIDES

THE next morning brought back the sunshine and Graham prepared for a restful garden lounge with his pipe, the "Manchester Guardian" and the proof-sheets of his chief's "History of Economic Liberalism," which it was his privilege to correct in the absence of their author. Margaret, after breakfast, had become involved in those mysterious and absorbent domestic duties which seem to demand the mornings of most grown-up daughters in their own homes. This invisibility of Margaret was responsible at once for Graham's disconsolation and for his half-unwilling satisfaction at having a few hours for thought and self-reproach. Reproach, because he told himself he was too old a hand, too much a man of the world, to fall in love, absurdly, as he had done, with a slip of a girl with eyes that brushed one's soul like angels' wings. There was an idiotic metaphor; that showed how he was losing his intellectual decency; "angels' wings"—he might be a schoolboy or one of those Troubadour fellows with striped

HYSSOP

tights. But against this annoyance with himself battled an instinct which generations of dominant males had handed down to him, the instinct that a man's passion, if it would not be stifled, must be satisfied. Perhaps, half-unconsciously, he took pleasure in defying those of his family who would consider Margaret a "nobody." He felt able to work himself into quite a fury at this detestable snobbery; Margaret was worth fifty of their vaunted kind—cynical, heartless, bloodless dolls. And even if her ideas were "immature" (and in that phrase he included not only lack of ripeness but any possible divergence from his, the polite world's, creed as to what was suitable for the young girl) they would develop under his influence. They would travel. He would show her Florence, Rome, Egypt. Together they would visit von Falkenstein in the Tyrol. Probably the Schloss would be lent for the honeymoon, if the time of year was suitable. His nerves tingled as he saw himself, at Margaret's side, leaning on the crumbling parapet over the resonance of the yawning river gulf, while the moon stroked the larch wood into velvet, and flickered on the snow-lined rocky summits opposite the castle crag. Together they would lie out in the Sahara, under the star-kissed sky, while the camels stirred sleepily at a distance, and beyond the dying fire they could see the muffled Arabs, motionless, enigmatic. Graham's fancy took him from place to place with Margaret at his side. In that richly dormant virgin

THE MAN DECIDES

mind he would sow seeds of beauty and experience. Under his guidance she should learn what books could tell her of life, what life could show her of music. With his help she should develop into the most gracious of all living things, an English lady. He had the money, the knowledge and the love to teach her. She had the beauty, the freshness, the eager outlook to repay his teaching a thousandfold. His mood of self-reproach gave way gradually to his visions of the future, and they in their turn to a consideration of the immediate present.

The best plan still seemed to be, if possible, to include Margaret and her mother in the motor trip of the following week. There was plenty of room in the car—he had fortunately decided on a five-seated body at the last moment—the weather had picked up again, in fact there seemed no reason to anticipate any difficulty. A week of the intimacy of day-long motoring would concentrate better than anything else the short time at his disposal before his necessary return to town. He was doubly glad that he had agreed with Lionel to make no visiting arrangements at the numerous country houses in the northern counties at which the two, in the course of their trip, would have been made welcome as overnight guests. Prospects seemed reasonably bright; his failure, if he met with one, would point to dire mismanagement.

He looked about him, but still there was no sign of Margaret. The low grey stone house, with

HYSSOP

its creeper-shaded, white-framed windows and brown slate roof, smiled at him, solidly comfortable, across the sunlit space of lawn and flower-bed. Once he thought he saw Margaret at the window of a first floor room, but it was only a glimpse and the figure was gone. Mrs. Wake appeared on the terrace, looked vaguely about her, and wandered off towards the kitchen garden. Mr. Wake could be seen at his desk in the library, his white head bent over a pile of papers, as usual desperately busy with nothing in particular. Lionel, Graham knew, was practising approach shots in the paddock. Everyone was out of the way. If only Margaret would come. The wish had hardly crossed his mind when the girl, a shady garden hat on her head, appeared round the corner of the house, followed by her two Aberdeens. Seeing Graham, she crossed the lawn towards him, and took, with a grave simplicity, the chair he offered her.

"I think you have earned a rest, Miss Wake. It was really valiant of you and Mrs. Wake to honour us at all at breakfast this morning after your late nights at Oxford."

"I hate breakfast in bed," said Margaret. "The bed gets full of toast crumbs and one has to get up sometime, which is much harder about twelve o'clock than it is at eight, don't you think so?"

"I am afraid I am rather a sinner about early rising," he returned. "A job like mine is demoralising, as it means late hours every night

THE MAN DECIDES

and no call to work before eleven at the earliest. Besides, when one moves among people who just don't know what nine-thirty in the morning looks like, it makes one conspicuous to be an authority on it, and all the people I meet about live the same dislocated, unreasonable lives, that waste the best part of the day in sleep and the best part of the night in chattering. So it is indeed refreshing to be for a short time among normal beings. I have had a delicious morning out here, but the newspaper remains unopened and my proof-sheets uncorrected. Do you find that a country life makes it hard to do your work?"

"My work?" returned the girl. "Oh—I have no real work like a man. I try to do what I can because I hate idleness. But I'd like to do something—to stand on my own feet."

Graham was amused.

"What sort of thing?"

"I don't know—I'm too stupid to write or speak. But I should like to do something—to help other women." She turned to him gleamingly. "Don't you think women have a very cruel time, Mr. St. George?"

"In what way do you mean?"

"In a hundred ways. It seems to me that every new thing I learn shows the greater unfairness and hardships that women have to meet. It must be splendid to feel that one's work, like yours for instance, can become a power for change."

HYSSOP

"No doubt there are injustices, Miss Wake. But you talk almost as vigorously as the Suffragettes!"

His remark was in intention jocular. But Margaret was perfectly grave as she replied:

"They are wonderful. I wish I had their pluck."

Graham felt slightly uneasy. This was not the proper attitude for a young girl. Who had been filling her head with such ideas? But it was a phase only. Her gentle enthusiasm charmed him as something hardly serious, but utterly captivating, like the spasmodic helpfulness of a child or the dignity with which puppies or kittens will at times reject the rolling ball or the dangled paper. He continued the conversation:

"Yes, they are very brave. But I feel it is mistaken gallantry. Without wishing to utter offensive platitudes, I do think that women have nobler things to think about than politics. Such work should be left to us coarser beings. The beauty in our lives comes from the mysterious aloofness of good women—and if we were fighting you all day over the cross-benches, where would romance be any longer? You would be sorry to murder romance, Miss Wake?"

She smiled.

"I would rather murder anything than that. But is romance ever disillusion?"

"Not real romance," he returned gently—and for a moment they sat silent.

"You suit this garden," he said at last.

THE MAN DECIDES

“I do? Why?”

“You are both very serene and very sunny and very—beautiful.”

She blushed, but her laugh was natural enough.

“You should see the garden on one of our real February days, when the fog is yellow and there are sheets of rain, and mud all over the lawn. Then I should hardly thank you for repeating the comparison.”

“Why not? Isn’t the recuperative power of Nature one of her most wonderful features? The rain over, the mud dry, the fog blown away—and then this. One has sorrows—but they pass, and you should not have many sorrows in your life.”

“No, not yet in any case.” The thought of Philip and his passionate look rose in her mind. But he had never called her beautiful. Was she beautiful? Poor Philip. What a lovely day it was. Mr. St. George’s voice was very musical; if he ever got very angry he would be rather splendid and very terrifying. He seemed to know about most things. He was taller than Philip—it wouldn’t have been so easy to brush his cheek with her hair, if it had been he instead of Philip. Why on earth should it have been he? The conversation had been too personal. She would change it.

“When do you and Lionel start for your motor tour?”

“Well—I thought perhaps on Monday. I have been considering it, and it would be a tremendous

HYSSOP

pleasure to me if I could persuade you and your mother to join us. There's heaps of room."

"Oh, I'd love to," cried Margaret. "But I am afraid mother won't go and then I can't. Unless Lionel is chaperon enough"—she added, laughing.

"He might be sufficient to curb my lapses I think," returned Graham, "if that was all that was involved. But I think you'd be happier staying about at inns, with your mother or some other lady as company. It's splendid that you fancy the idea. We will work together to undermine all opposition. I will begin on your brother. Do you go and make subtle assaults on Mrs. Wake."

Mutually laughing at their conspiracy they separated, Margaret to find her mother, Graham to the paddock in search of Lionel. It occurred to neither to suggest gaining the approval of Mr. Wake.

Margaret found her mother in spiritual conflict with the second housemaid, who had used the wrong pillow-slips for Mr. St. George's bedroom. She turned with patient dignity to hear her daughter's business. She thought Mr. St. George's suggestion a very kind and delightful one but, alas! it was quite impossible for her to get away, engaged as she was to attend the annual general meeting of the Leeds Maternity Hospital, to fulfil accepted invitations to one dinner and three garden parties, and finally to break in a new kitchenmaid, whose innate vices had gained

THE MAN DECIDES

additional impetus from her mistress' absence in Oxford. Margaret looked crestfallen.

"Then I suppose I mayn't go."

"My dear, so far as I am concerned, of course you might go, but I'm sure you'd be happier with another woman. Couldn't you get one of your friends to go with you? Ring up Nellie Carter."

Nellie, telephoned to, was enraptured, and should she take an evening dress? No, only something "high"; they were staying at inns. Would it be cold? What hat would Molly wear? Had she had fun at Oxford?—and so on. Her friend's effervescence suggested to Margaret an expedient for arrangement-making more convenient than the telephone, and she asked Nellie to come round to tea that afternoon; they would play a little tennis and talk plans. Thus appeased, Miss Carter consented to "hang up."

In the meantime Lionel had received the intelligence of his mother's possible co-operation in their tour with some consternation.

"She hates going fast. And we'll never be able to try the engine out. What on earth induced you to suggest such a thing? Might as well go round in a brougham."

Graham laughed. "I think that by leading up to it gently—I mean by increasing speed very gradually—Mrs. Wake will never know how fast we are going. I'll take off the speedometer. What is the idea of this course of yours?—oh, between the trees and down in two?—I see. Come on, give me the cleek."

HYSSOP

And they devoted themselves to such golf practice as the limits of the paddock permitted.

When the party met at lunch Margaret began at once :

“ Mother couldn’t come, but she thought it a lovely plan and suggested my getting a friend, so I rang up—— Guess whom, Lionel.”

Lionel, immensely relieved at this deliverance, replied banteringly : “ I don’t know all your little friends, dear Molly. Probably some siren that I last saw in short frocks with holes in her stockings.”

“ I shall tell her that,” cried Margaret merrily —“ it’s Nellie Carter.”

“ Oh, Nellie,” said Lionel with transparent off-handedness. “ Why should I mind you telling her ? It’s not so long ago that she was in short frocks either.”

“ It’s still shorter ago, oddly enough, brother mine, that she sat on people’s knees at parties ! ”

“ Molly, really ! ” interposed her mother.

The girl went on eating, leaving her brother looking very embarrassed and Graham highly amused. But he was not too amused to realise the wonderful stroke of good fortune that had befallen. Instead of Mrs. Wake, vague but omnipresent, and naturally inclined to be with her daughter so as to leave her son with his friend, the gods had substituted a young woman, who, though a friend of Margaret’s, was plainly also on excellent terms with Lionel.

The tacit divisions of the party were self-

THE MAN DECIDES

evident from the first. Graham glowed with pleasure. But, discreetly, he said nothing to Lionel after lunch, either about the arrangement or about the little contretemps at table, contenting himself with congratulating Margaret on having settled matters, and then engaging Mr. Wake in a lengthy discussion on rose-growing, which kept both gentlemen for long enough in the garden, perspiring, the one from enthusiasm for his subject, the other from the sun.

Miss Nellie Carter, who appeared at four o'clock exuberant as ever and wearing a very short white tennis skirt and a very large hat, was dark-haired and rosy. She chattered a great deal, while her fine, lively eyes danced from person to person of the group, bestowing on Graham a look of challenging curiosity and on Lionel one of almost demure impertinence. Lionel himself greeted her somewhat curtly, as though she were a child who was insisting on his eating a chocolate which she had previously licked, and immediately withdrew to see that the net was all right. Apparently it wasn't, as they had all begun tea in the large old-fashioned drawing-room before he returned.

Nellie, when he had first left them, embarked at once on the question of the motor tour.

"Is it a very powerful car?" she asked Graham in a voice suggesting awe and gratitude.

"Forty-five horse-power," he replied—"nothing very remarkable. But I've no real use for anything so violent that it can't be used comfortably

HYSSOP

in London as well as in the country. Still—I hope we may be able to get along quite nicely.”

“Oh, I love going fast—and then I lean back in the—what do you call it—and look languid and pretend the car belongs to me. I’ve never known anyone taken in yet, but I always hope.”

“We will all of us behave with the utmost deference to you at the stops,” returned Graham, laughing, “and ask your advice about repairs. That may help.”

“Indeed it wouldn’t. I’m hopeless at machinery. No—my only chance is to appear the capitalist, so to speak, who is no specialist but who motors for the pure pleasure of air and scenery—and company.” She bowed mockingly.

“Not to me, please,” said Graham. “I am only the chauffeur. Bow rather to Miss Wake.”

The words reminded Nellie of her friend’s recent visit to Oxford, and while Graham busied himself with handing tea, she settled down to a string of searching questions often placing Margaret in serious quandaries as to how to answer. The latter decided on extravagant romancing.

“Proposals? My dear Nellie, I daren’t think how many I had. Ten at least. Don’t ask me to tell you about them. I should never keep them apart.—No, I didn’t accept any.—Well, because I felt that matrimony would separate me from my charming friends before I was ready to let them go.—Without a single exception my partners were surpassingly handsome and danced divinely.”

THE MAN DECIDES

Lionel entering the room at this moment, his sister concluded, "No one with my experience of Oxford men could dance again with anyone from another university."

"Spoils your step for modern dances I suppose, Molly?" retorted Lionel. "Tell me how you do a Mazurka. I always wanted to know." He sat down on Miss Carter's other side. "I haven't seen you for ages, Nellie. How's the world been treating you? That awful dog of yours still alive?"

"Lionel, you beast. I hate you. Dear Splodge is as well as ever. If the least harm comes to him I shall have you arrested."

"No good, Nellie; we lawyers have every jury under our thumb. You'd never get a verdict."

"Well then I shall punish you myself."

"You do that sufficiently by your continual absence from my sight," the young man returned gallantly.

"Well, you'll not have anything to complain of during our week in Mr. St. George's motor. Even when I stick hatpins into you for hours together, you will be forced to smile bravely and pretend you love it."

"It sounds," contributed Graham, "as though I shall have to separate you two and ask Miss Carter to sit in front with me."

"And leave brother and sister together? That would never do," said Miss Carter briskly, who had not been watching the direction of

H Y S S O P

Graham's eyes for nothing during her conversation.

"Then you must promise not to quarrel with Lionel."

"They'll be good," said Margaret, "they both know how to keep their distance"—and she glanced shinningly at her friend.

"Molly dear," said Miss Carter, "you are a cat."

"Nellie," Mrs. Wake surged into the talk, "will you tell your mother when you get home that Mrs. Frensham threatens to come and see me about a character for Annie who used to be with us? You remember—at least you don't, as she was a cook, and I expect you never saw her—but at any rate tell your mother that if she can stop Mrs. Frensham I shall be eternally grateful. I've already written dozens of letters about the girl and there is positively nothing else to say. Fish was her weak spot, fish and meringues. So few cooks make good meringues nowadays."

"What is good form in a meringue, Mrs. Wake? Should it be crisp and shoot across the room when you prod it, or should it stretch into infinite toughness while you grind it on the plate?"

"You shall see to-night, Mr. St. George. I have a cook now that makes excellent ones." Then turning to her son, "Don't you think you might have a game, Lionel—if you've all finished?"

"I've hardly begun, mother," said Lionel,

THE MAN DECIDES

“but I’ll save my appetite for the meringues. Are you ready, ladies?”

They removed to the tennis lawn. Margaret, as she served, looked at Graham’s strong slim back at the net, and liked the curl in his hair and the quick vigour of his strokes. He kept Lionel continually on the run, and the set fell to him and Margaret without much difficulty. As they crossed to the other court for the return he said to her :

“You are a great performer, Miss Wake. So few girls serve a really strong overhand.”

And she felt herself warm with the pleasure of his praise.

That night, as she plaited her hair for the night, she looked long at her reflection in the glass. Her loose dressing-gown showed her firm white neck and the sight of it recalled Philip and the moment of his proposal. But somehow the remembrance did not give her quite the thrill it had the previous evening. Much more stirring was the thought that Graham had told her, first that she was beautiful, and then that she was a good tennis player. “I expect he’s said that to heaps of girls before,” she told herself, but in her heart she knew that, even if he had, she didn’t care much. It didn’t seem to make any great difference.

Chapter Ten

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

I

ON the morning of departure the party assembled in high spirits. Nellie Carter arrived at the Wakes' about half-past nine with a large trunk and a hat-box following her on a wheelbarrow in charge of an aged gardener.

"I know I'm hours too soon," she shouted as Margaret came across the grass towards her, "but I *do* so want your advice about clothes."

"My dear Nellie, no one with as many as that box must contain can need any advice but a strong recommendation to prune. What do you think we are, a circus?"

"Don't cry before you're hurt, miss," retorted Nellie sharply. "I've brought round all I have and you are to help me select."

The girls unpacked the trunk in the hall, Nellie simulating vast confusion and giggles when the floor gleamed white with "undies."

"Molly—how awful if Mr. St. George came now! Whatever should I do?" And she

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

scuttled about among the scattered lingerie with an air of urgent embarrassment.

"I expect he'd get over it," said Margaret calmly. "He's probably seen a nightdress before, you know. And shop windows often contain——"

"Molly, you're being horrid. I should never dare to look him in the face if—oh"—a little shriek—"here he comes."

It was only Lionel, however, who regarded the scene with open mouth.

"My good girls, what *is* happening? Is this an all-white sale or something?"

"Go away, you rude man," pouted Miss Carter. "There's nothing here for you."

"Nothing at all—
Nothing at all—
Nothing at all for you-u-u——"

hummed Lionel as he went upstairs.

The sorting of clothes went on uninterrupted. To Nellie's disappointment there was no sign of St. George. By half-past ten the hat-box was packed and added to the other luggage in the ante-hall. The aged gardener departed with the now half-empty trunk. Distant snorts and crashes announced the preparation of the car.

"Perhaps the ladies would start behind," said Graham when all was ready.

The discretion was patent and generally approved. Lionel got in by the car's owner and they coughed themselves out of the gates and slid rapidly down the Chapeltown Road.

HYSSOP

The first day's programme opened with Fountain's Abbey. The late start and the beauty of the ruined church forced them to lunch in its neighbourhood. They pressed on to Ripon, only to be tempted by architecture and old shops into deciding to stay there the night. According to schedule, Ripon should have been Whitby, so the start next day must be an early one. Tuesday morning's run from Ripon was a triumph. The car went like a dream. The moors from Helmsley onwards lay magnificently asleep in a haze of sunlight. Whitby seemed tawdry after the heather; also it smelt of fish. They hardly paused but zigzagged west to Richmond and Barnard Castle. On getting into the car again at the latter place for the final run into Durham, Graham first experienced the expected assistance of Miss Carter.

"Lionel, you might come and sit by me a bit. I'm far nicer than the sparking plug or whatever it is you glare at in front. And Molly is so prickly and floaty she makes me hot."

"May I hold your hand, Nellie, if I come?"

"Certainly not," she replied with dignity, "but I'll give you a glove to stroke every now and then just for old sake's sake."

Graham laughed.

"I'm afraid, Miss Margaret, you will have to try and put up with me. Old associations are too strong for Lionel."

Thus distributed they sped upon their way. The arrangement held, as Graham meant that it

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

should, on the following day, and by the time they had drawn up at the inn at Chollerford Bridge his intimacy with Margaret had developed remarkably. For her part, the problem of Philip was fast vanishing from her mind. The exhilaration of rushing through the air, the sunny loveliness of fields and woods, lulled her into a passive content. Graham became a familiar and delightful companion. He talked sensibly and amusingly but not too much. He drove with a clean perfection that delighted her. She liked to watch his lean strong hand on the wheel, to note the accuracy with which he manipulated clutch and gears. With him at the wheel there was no jarring screech, no sudden jerk. He took sharp turns without any slackening of speed, but the control he had over his engine made nervousness an absurdity. The car responded to his touch as readily as a horse. The very unconsciousness of her happiness should have told her that she was slipping into love. But love never occurred to her. The contentment was a perfection of the normal. It was all-sufficing but restful.

Thursday was spent dawdling along the line of the Roman Wall. When the roads allowed, the party would leave the car and ramble to the fort or camp near which they had stopped. Graham knew just sufficient of the wall's topography and history to be interesting but not oppressive. Generally Margaret was his only companion. The other two found it continually necessary to be just out of sight. Apparently

HYSSOP

they could only judge of the shooting or golfing possibilities of each spot by surveying the ground from behind a bank, or over the nearest crest. The day passed all too soon, and a few drops of rain as they ran into Carlisle presaged ill for the morrow. But Friday morning was fair, if overcast, and they wound through the Lake District to Ambleside with only a few short showers. The cloudy weather added greatly to the beauty of the hills, which borrowed every shade from sun-flecked green to deepest purple. The distances were very clear—too clear for fine weather but ideally coloured for the passing motorist. The lakes themselves mirrored the great black clouds with their intervening patches of blue. Not a breath of wind blew low enough to ripple the smoothness of their surface. Margaret's content deepened and her lover's hopes were tinged with no doubts beyond the actual moment for the test.

Saturday night found them at Settle. They had lunched on the moors and wandered at will among the rough grass and rushes. Returning to the car for a pipe from the place where he had left Margaret, Graham stumbled on Lionel and Nellie, sitting together in the shelter of a heathered slope. Their kiss was in full swing and, with a smile the intruder crept away unheard, his footsteps deadened by the springy turf. The very atmosphere of the tour was fraught with love-making. The gods, never unkind to him, were surpassing themselves. He diagnosed correctly

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

enough Margaret's state of mind, and was too skilful a lover to spoil his all by haste. He trusted to the waves of sentiment which irradiated from the tonneau behind them, to plead his cause more effectively in the general than he, at present, could do in the particular. It is hard to live with lovers without taking the love-infection, and even amourettes as slight and shallow as those of her brother and her friend would have their influence on Margaret, though she herself realised it not at all.

It had been intended to vary the short run from Settle to Leeds by a visit to Bolton, but the crowds of Saturday afternoon reminded Lionel that Bolton on Sunday would offer few retired corners. He therefore suggested a direct return home to avoid the trippers. His argument was approved, and further sightseeing was by common consent abandoned. A wet morning was a confirmation of their wisdom, and under the hood they reached for home, arriving in time for lunch.

"Well, and did you all have a good time?" asked Mrs. Wake.

"I have nothing to complain of," said Graham, smiling at the others who seemed inclined for silence. Margaret had deliberately left it to him to answer. During the last few days she had been waiting more and more on his initiative. He seemed so dependable an ally, so equipped for any circumstance. She now murmured that the week had indeed been delightful.

Miss Carter was too annoyed that it was over

HYSSOP

to voice her appreciation very heartily. She found expression of her bad temper in saying spitefully :

" We didn't see much of you anyway, Molly. Any pleasure Lionel or I may have had was entirely due to our own attractions."

The surprise in Margaret's face at this attack brought St. George to the rescue.

" Perhaps, Miss Carter, we were so sure of their potency that we forbore to interfere."

Nellie, who had immediately repented of her nastiness, laughed good-humouredly :

" We had old times to talk over, hadn't we, Lionel ? " And the contretemps was past.

In public Graham had got no further in his familiarity than the substitution of " Miss Margaret " for " Miss Wake," though when they were alone he had purposely dropped the prefix, an omission she had not seemed to notice. After lunch was over Nellie said she must go home. Purely in order to carry her hat-box Lionel would accompany her. They departed without more ado.

" Lionel's so funny with Nellie," said Mrs. Wake, showing more acuteness than anyone would have given her credit for, " he flirts so outrageously with her, she is the one girl I know he will never marry. Did they kiss each other noisily all the way, Molly ? "

" I never saw or heard them, mummy," replied her daughter, laughing. " Perhaps Mr. St. George can report."

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

"I?" asked Graham with a very convincing air of startled amusement. "Good gracious, no. I should never dream——!" But he wondered whether Mrs. Wake was not really more interested in his own relations with Margaret. The thought gave him a twinge of annoyance. Had the mother thrown them together purposely? However, Margaret's simple request to him to carry her a chair into the suntrap dispelled the suspicion that perhaps the scheming had not been all on his side. At least she was guileless enough. He took two chairs and sat down by her side. The suntrap, as it was called, was a stone-floored portico with a glass roof that had been thrown out in the corner made by the conservatory and the dining-room. It was reached through the former and was overlooked only from the garden. The afternoon was close and damp. The rain had stopped, but the grass was wet and the peace of Sunday lay heavy on the scene. Mrs. Wake had gone upstairs for her weekly nap. Mr. Wake was in his study enjoying the same recurrent relaxation, but under the name of "reading." Graham and Margaret sipped their coffee without speaking. He rolled a cigarette thoughtfully between his fingers.

"I hope you enjoyed our motor-trip," he said at length.

"It was perfectly lovely," she replied. "We were so lucky with the weather too."

"I was very grateful to you for coming with us. Lionel alone is a motor fiend, and would

HYSSOP

have forbidden me to stop and walk and sit about."

"You shouldn't thank *me* for preventing that," she laughed. "He seemed quite reconciled to occasional rambles, didn't he?"

"Miss Carter is admirable. Was she your idea?"

"No, mother's."

Mrs. Wake again. A remarkably clever old lady, thought Graham, under that pretence of vagueness. He chuckled to himself at her ingenuity, but once more the hint of another's management ruffled his pride. He relapsed into silence again and studied Margaret from under his eyelashes. As she lay in the long chair, her body was a harmony at rest. The full lips routed his momentary dissatisfaction. He spoke again:

"Do you often come to London, Margaret?"

"Only to shop and do some theatres. But I like the country best."

"What country—England?"

"England I think best of all, but I love France and Switzerland."

"And Italy?"

"I long to go there and get to know it. I've hardly ever been at all—only once to Aosta for a couple of days and once to Venice with a crowd of people." (Aosta, as she said it, evoked a picture in her mind, that of an old and loathsome *crétin*, grimacing on the outskirts of a crowd of begging children.)

He got up and walked to the edge of the portico

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

floor. The garden dripped in solitary slumber. A distant band brayed faintly to southward. The peace of the hour was profound. A slight movement at his shoulder told him Margaret was standing by his side. He turned and looked at her. She was very frail and child-like. A longing to protect, to watch over her, possessed him. Instinctively he laid a hand upon her shoulder. The warm flesh seemed to quiver at his touch, and in an instant his passion and his desire overbore all else. He held her fast, and turned her towards him :

“Margaret—beloved heart—I want you—I love you. You must love me, Margaret.”

She raised her eyes, eyes dazed and questioning, then with a little sigh she buried her face on his shoulder. Her body trembled, she clutched his coat convulsively. He bent to kiss her head, but his lips found, not her hair, but her mouth. It seemed that for all time their kisses swooned and clung.

II

Mrs. Wake was too good a social strategist to spoil even a successful campaign by open triumph. She drew her daughter, by the subtle magnetism of maternal sympathy, from the studied ordinarieness of Sunday drawing-room tea to the seclusion of her private retreat. Fluttering absently over the kettle and its brood of cups, her vague, un-

HYSSOP

certain eyes had immediately detected that the battle she had for a week been fighting had been won. Margaret avoided Graham; she talked eagerly to a calling vicar, to Lionel, even to her father. But shining looks betrayed her to the practised eye, looks which met and mated in mid-air with others of their kind. They had hardly closed the door of Mrs. Wake's sanctum behind them, when the story was out. There were no blushing whispers from Margaret; she seemed to radiate pride and happiness, as with flushed face and eager movements she told her mother the event which would make that afternoon for ever memorable. Mrs. Wake spared herself none of the stages of immemorial usage. From momentary bewilderment to a little gasp of astonishment, from the dawning smile to the moment when, with brimming eyes, she folded her daughter in her arms, she omitted nothing. Later she hurried to find Graham. "My dear Graham . . . such a surprise! We are all so happy . . ." Then more playfully, "I have always been afraid of Lionel's friends; usually because their manners were so bad, but I never before had reason to complain of their being too good!" And Graham played the game and never questioned the sincerity of the good lady's surprise.

Margaret felt that since the afternoon she had begun a new life. As she stood once more before her mirror at night, her bare shoulders recalled, as they had done once before, her other lover. She realised with a start and a twinge of self-reproach

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

that all this week, when she had bestowed no thought upon him, he had been living on the hope of her reply. Was it really only ten days ago that she had danced at Oxford? She determined that to-morrow she must write—a difficult letter it would be—and end his suspense. She mazed herself to sleep over the opening sentences.

But next day there was so little time. Graham was an exacting lover, there were a hundred things to settle, a hundred things to discuss, a thousand kisses to exchange. Friends were to be told, though no notice was to go to the papers till the future was more clearly settled. Nellie Carter had to be soothed (she gleaned the news from some unknown source long before anyone else and came tearing round to say she had *known* it would happen all along), aunts had to be written to by Mrs. Wake and the letters inspected. Tuesday and Wednesday glided by with the same golden haste. On Thursday she made a serious effort to write to Philip but somehow the words wouldn't come. Sunday saw another unavailing effort made. Graham declared he must go to London and secure a longer period of leave. While he was away, Margaret moped and wrote him endless letters, and was kissed and cried over by her girl friends with equal assiduity and far more splash than ever Graham aspired to. When he returned, she was so engrossed in having him again that letter-writing was inconceivable. In these and other ways the time was allowed to pass unnoticed, until, one day, among gloves and

HYSSOP

ribbons, she turned up the programme of the Wallace ball. With a genuine fear she read the printed date and calculated anxiously the course of time. It was her last day. If the letter did not go to-night she would have overstepped her own limit and broken her word. She sat down without more ado and after several attempts evolved the following :

“ DEAR PHILIP,

“ You don’t mind my calling you that ? for, after all, we have gone fairly deep into intimacy, haven’t we ? I find it hard to say to you what must be said. You have done me the honour to say you love me, and the restraint of your saying it touched me very deeply. But I feared from the first that I could give you nothing worthy in return. The events of the last month have proved that I was right. I am going now to tell you what is not generally known, because it explains why I know that I am right, and because I hope that you will sometime wish me the happiness as another’s wife that you would have tried to give me as your own. I have met and become engaged to Mr. Graham St. George, of whom you have doubtless heard. The certainty that I love him helps me to believe that the pain this letter must cause you is unavoidable. I am terribly sorry that in this great matter you have had the wretchedness of offering and I have not the happiness of being able to accept.

THE LETTER IS WRITTEN

Will you try and forget me as a lover but remember me as your always sincere and grateful friend,

“ MARGARET WAKE.”

Graham's voice below, calling her impatiently, hurried this letter into its envelope unread a second time. Possibly, otherwise, Margaret would have remarked on the slurring over of those weeks during which Philip's suspense was being unjustifiably prolonged and falsely lulled. But as it was, she joined Graham for a walk and, posting the letter at the corner, was conscious of quite a glow of sisterly affection for the boy whose proffered love she had perforce refused.

“ Who is the letter to ? ” asked Graham.

“ Only a dressmaker person, you jealous old silly.”

And they walked happily down the hill.

Chapter Eleven

THE LETTER IS READ

MARGARET'S letter reached Chiswick by the first post, a week before the Civil Service Examination was due to begin. Philip had spent a wearisome July between his den at home and that of his crammer in town. Prospects were encouraging. His last year had been an industrious one and the knowledge that had served him well in schools had been acquired too painfully to be forgotten immediately afterwards. Throughout the month following the Wallace Ball he had been buoyed up and inspired to ceaseless toil by the expectation of Margaret's answer. Periods of utter pessimism had assailed him at first, but as the time drew on and she did not write, he became more and more confident. Surely, he thought, if the decision was to be against him she would have arrived at it before the month was fully run, and to defer his knowing would be mere cruelty. Such scrupulous observance of the period agreed upon, as, when every day passed without a letter, he realised she meant to keep, could only point to consent and acceptance. He thrilled with joy, amazing his mother by his

cheerfulness and even drawing a grudging remark from the crammer in commendation of his industry. There was little time for the weaving of dreams, and he was content to allow the now golden future to glow as a tremendous and inspiring background of his present efforts. But its light filled every cranny of his being, till he longed to tell everyone he met of the jewel he had won and of the happiness he was to enjoy.

On this particular morning, a week before the ordeal was to begin which was to end the only remaining troubles life seemed to hold, he came into the breakfast-room whistling gaily, to find his mother already sipping her coffee and glancing at the paper. The sun was streaming into the room across the glittering river-bend; the wide open window admitted air of a freshness and purity that made London seem a hundred miles away.

"Good morning, mother, what a ripping day. Any news."

"No, dear, you know there's never anything at this time of year."

Philip laughed. "Do you ever read anything but the picture notes, mother? I believe if we were at war, your chief feeling would be one of annoyance at the cessation of new shows!"

"Goose," smiled his mother. But she did not deny the charge. Ever since her husband's death, the habit of living in and studying the picture-dealing world had seemed to hold her more firmly than before. It was a kind of tribute to his

HYSSOP

memory. So many mornings had they pored over auctions, criticisms, programmes of exhibitions. She would have been guilty, after his death, of a desertion almost as heinous as an actual elopement during his lifetime, had she abandoned the interests that, because they were his, she had made hers. She continued placidly skimming the paper as when her son had entered.

His first action, as always, was to look for the letter. The month was up to-day. And the letter had arrived. The handwriting leapt to meet him as he pushed away the bill that hid it from his sight. He made no sign, merely thrusting it into his pocket to be read upstairs and alone, and got himself food and coffee. He was so excited that he could hardly talk or eat, but it had become a point of honour to show none of the varying moods of the past month to his mother and now, so near release, he was not going to let his self-control fail.

Breakfast went by quietly enough. He threw away half a cigarette, pushed back his chair and stood up. His heart was beating like giant piston. Casually he said :

“ Well, I’m off upstairs to work, mother. See you at lunch.”

“ Very well, dear,” smiled Mrs. Murray placidly.

The door of the dining-room shut behind him.

At the sound of the lunch-gong Mrs. Murray put the last letter into its envelope and went upstairs to wash. When she came down, Philip

THE LETTER IS READ

was standing at the window looking out over the river. At her step he turned and went to his chair without a word. She was about to make a trivial enquiry about his work when she saw his face. It was the face of a paralytic. There was neither colour nor expression. The very eyes were dead. Thoroughly startled she said nothing and, pretending to eat, watched him narrowly.

He played with his fork, crumbled a little bread. His motions were numbed, automatic in their impersonality. Mrs. Murray sent the servant away when the fruit salad had been brought. "We will get the cheese if we want any." Then she got up and went round the table to him :

"Pip, boy, are you unwell ? "

He shook his head and forced a semblance of appetite. She went back to her seat and the rest of the meal passed in silence. Her napkin rolled up, she sat a minute and watched him scraping a piece of butter from the plate to his knife, from his knife to the plate again, interminably, with dreadful regularity. The sun still filled the room. It shone on the litter of glass and broken food, on the great silver bowl of roses in the centre of the table. But where it touched the boy's hand its warmth and glitter seemed dulled and baffled.

Again the mother rose softly and went to her son. Softly she stroked his hair.

"Can't I help, darling ? I don't want to know anything you would rather not tell me, but I

H Y S S O P

have a right to help when my son is miserable. Someone has hurt you, Pip. Won't you tell me what has happened ? ”

He swayed a moment and gropingly clutched her hand. Then, with a sudden droop, he buried his head in his arms and sobbed as though his heart would break.

That evening he sat on a stool by his mother's feet in the long upstairs drawing-room. The French windows on to the curved iron balcony were open, and Mrs. Murray's chair was placed just inside the room. It was very hot. Philip was pale, but calm and controlled. The suppressed agony that had tortured him at lunch had vanished in his passionate tears and under the skilful soothing of his mother's sympathy. The whole thing had been told, a simple story enough, but Mrs. Murray was no fool and by neither word nor sign had she minimised the bitter disappointment that seemed a ghastly tragedy. At least he was now once more able to talk of the present, even of the future. On one point he was immovable. The Civil Service was impossible. He declared himself unable to face any examination at all ; he would inevitably fail. Recognising that he wished to banish every occupation, to relinquish every ambition with which Margaret had, in his mind, been connected, Mrs. Murray made no attempt to press the pity such an abandonment would be, after so much work and when success seemed within his reach.

THE LETTER IS READ

"And what will you do instead?" she asked gently.

For a minute her son smoked in silence. She watched the smoke curl to the window and whisk into nothing at the bidding of some secret breath of wind. At last he said:

"I wondered whether Uncle Roger would have me now."

Mrs. Murray reflected, weighing the suggestion thoughtfully. The plan had advantages. It would involve a complete change not only of occupation but of scene. Besides—he needn't stay in America all his life. When this sadness had blown over——

"I will write to him," she rejoined, "and ask whether the offer is still open."

"You'll be awfully lonely, mother. It seems a shame to go off . . ."

"Don't trouble about me, Pip. You'll soon come back, I dare say."

And so it was settled.

Uncle Roger was written to. Pending his answer, and to avoid awkward relations who would fuss about his abandoned Civil Service with an intensity increasing with their distance, Philip fled to Brittany. An urgent line to Paris brought Laddie to meet him. On a sunny sea-shore the story of the disaster was told. Laddie said he was damned. "I'm fearfully sorry, Phil. You deserved better of fate than that." They relapsed into silence and the subject was not referred to again. Philip was as grateful to his

HYSSOP

friend as he had been to his mother, for their complete avoidance of any blame to Margaret. Any hint from them that he had been hardly treated would have meant an explosion of anger and its attendant troubles.

Laddie hastened back to his work and Philip trudged northern France alone.

Not until almost the end of the first week in September did a note from his mother reach Philip on his lonely wanderings, with the news that Uncle Roger had written. Mrs. Murray greeted her son calmly on his return to Chiswick and commented rather tartly on her brother-in-law.

"He never loses an opportunity of airing his views. He ought to be an anti-vivisectionist, with his talent for turning every commonplace into a poster."

"Let me see his letter."

It was very long but, amazingly, not type-written. The address had an Indian look, and the State was not New York. Plainly Uncle Roger was taking a holiday. He began by expressing a pompous gratification at what he took to be his nephew's long-deferred recognition of the worthlessness of England as a place for a life's work. "I am, I confess it, relieved that the luxurious idleness of University life has not wholly dulled his ambition and his manliness. At the same time you would not blame me, my dear Edith, for commenting a little grimly on the boy's cool readiness to make use now of me and the opportunities I can offer, when less than five years ago

THE LETTER IS READ

he regarded them as beneath his dignity. I am not however the man to nourish a grievance, and the whims of an effete country like the one to which you and my poor brother, your husband, have so pathetically clung, do not any longer meet with other than quite kindly tolerance in this great republic."

("That's not bad," said Philip, "considering poor old father never came near England if he could help it all his life!")

"You ask me," continued Uncle Roger's fountain pen, "to find Philip a place in my office. You say he is anxious to start at once. I smile a little at his probable conception of work; the phrase, to the Oxford student, has, no doubt, a significance quite peculiar. Further, he should realise that, had he come to me when I first suggested it, he would be occupying by now a position of prominence and even trust. He will not expect, I presume, to begin anywhere than at the bottom of the ladder. We have no place for young aristocrats who consider office work beneath them."

("He seems to think I'm a bit of an outsider, doesn't he?")

"I suppose it's his manner, dear. He always was a little sultry and oppressive.")

The letter went on to say that a subordinate position could be allotted to Philip in the Murray-Schlamberger Manufacturing Co., Ltd., but not until the beginning of November. Uncle Roger would naturally wish to be able to welcome his

H Y S S O P

nephew and see him settled in his new work. Why Uncle Roger could not superintend the ceremony earlier than November was not explained. Later experience taught Philip that the breathlessness of American business life was partly due to the abnormally long and very frequent vacations with which it was interspersed. Uncle Roger was not going to miss a country autumn for any number of nephews.

The only note of anything approaching geniality in the letter was the statement that Philip would be welcomed as his uncle's guest in New York.

"I believe he makes himself very comfortable," remarked Mrs. Murray, "and though he'll never admit it, finds bachelor life a bit lonely. You'll be within hail of homilies, but at least the food will be good and the beds aired."

"Is that rarely the case in America then?"

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea, but all this tilting at our degeneracy makes one look for some deliberate discomfort as a kind of justification."

The time of waiting was an annoyance, but Philip was glad that he was to leave England, and events were shaping more fortunately than they might have done. The raw violence of his grief had healed into an ugly scar; but the aimlessness of all his rosy schemes, the waste of the Civil Service grind, the waste even of his schools work (he secured an unsensational but well-deserved first, more to his own surprise than that of his tutor), threw him into a lethargy of idleness.

THE LETTER IS READ

Immediately on the receipt of his uncle's letter he wrote, first a note of thanks to the sender, and secondly an announcement of his arrival to Dallas Merrick, suggesting a visit to Danvers before his work began. This idea not only fulfilled a long-standing promise which had seemed unlikely of fulfilment, but also fixed his departure from England ten days or so earlier than would otherwise have been possible. The next step was to find a suitable boat (he never doubted the Merricks confirming his self-invitation), and further satisfaction resulted from the necessity of taking a slow liner direct to Boston. These were practically his last signs of initiative. He let his whole existence drift of its own, writing no letters, seeing no one. Several invitations from friends and relations he refused. The days passed, either in weary idleness at Chiswick or in wide aimless wanderings in London. He took buses as far as they went and struck off through slums and byways till time or weariness suggested another bus, a taxi, or an underground. Purposely he avoided the shopping centres or those streets where he would certainly meet one or another of his friends. He lived in terror of seeing Margaret herself. At the thought, wild longing and a kind of panic blended in his mind. Wherever he went, he carried in his pocket-book a snapshot of himself, Margaret and her mother on the sunny neck of a Swiss mountain pass, and clipped on to it the paragraph announcing her engagement to Graham St. George. At times the personality of

H Y S S O P

his successful rival had for Philip an almost morbid interest. He never connected, even if he remembered, Burkett's mention of St. George, that afternoon on the Cherwell. Even at the time it had been a trivial detail in the situation. His familiarity with the name, when he had read it in Margaret's letter, seemed merely the familiarity of one subconsciously aware of a semi-public person. St. George was not the sort of man of whom rumour has anything definite to say. He was realised as existing by a largish number of people, and Philip among them, because he figured frequently in the papers, and his photograph (at race meetings, political functions, country-house parties) had been known to adorn the pages of the London illustrated press. Philip came across one such photograph by chance in the Tube. An abandoned "Bystander" on an empty seat opposite attracted him. The wearisome snobberies of the society pages would have been harshly turned had not a name happened to catch his eye. "Lady Plinlimmon with Mr. Graham St. George are seen enjoying a joke." He studied the picture. Through all the grotesqueness of arrested grins and feet frozen in mid-air he recognised St. George for an attractive looking man. "No wonder," he thought miserably, "I hadn't a look in against that chap." He winced at the thought of Margaret herself, flaunted before the public gaze in some lily-livered journal-de-toilette. "Cupid at work." "The week's Delicious Darts." "May-fair Marries," some such pretentious sentiment-

THE LETTER IS READ

alism would head the page. The vulgarity of it ! Margaret a snob-tickler ! He remembered an Oxford talk with Laddie—" girls who spend their lives in a physical shop window." And now someone had entered the shop and bought her. He was getting perilously near disloyalty, and he flung the magazine from him. At the next station he got out and walked away into London, angrily haunted by the smell of forced Tube air ; " the place smelt like a catacomb of indiarubber corpses."

It was about the third week in October that the Carnforths had their dance. Viola Carnforth was a very old friend, she would be dreadfully hurt if Philip didn't go. After some persuasion Philip yielded to his mother's wish, and rather to his surprise, he felt happier than he had done since July, when they stood together in the drawing-room at ten o'clock waiting for the taxi which was to take them into town. He cheered up still more at the gleaming boards, the lights and voices, the plaintive wailing of the violins. At one o'clock Mrs. Murray went home, but Philip refused to leave ; his programme was all but full ; the ordinary joys of social life were less tasteless than he had assumed. About number 16 he was taking a grateful rest in the smoking-room when there entered Harry Carnforth and a man whom Philip instantly recognised as Graham St. George. Harry grinned cheerfully at Philip. " Here's a man wants a male diversion. Bored with girls. Take him on, will you ? I must fly. St. George,

H Y S S O P

this is Philip Murray, one of the wits of Shepherd's Bush."

He vanished. St. George took the arm-chair next Philip and smiled. "Unceremonious, the good Henry. My name is St. George." As they talked Philip studied him carefully. The situation had its piquancy; the successful lover, all unconsciously subjected to the scrutiny of the defeated rival. St. George was decidedly the right sort. He was unaffected and perfectly at ease. Any scorn he may have had for the obvious undergraduate was carefully concealed. In return, Philip forgot his hostility to St. George's world and its conventions in the charm of the individual personality. It soon came out that Philip was going to America.

"A good place," commented St. George. "I know New York and Washington well. Will you be out there long?"

"I expect so. Probably several years."

"That'll be very interesting. We may meet this winter. I have to be out there for a week or two in December. My last trip *en garçon*," and he laughed.

"I hope so," assented Philip politely. The wound was so unconsciously inflicted.

The music reached them again, swaying into the syncopated stride of number 17. Both men rose.

"Chained to the chariot wheels," said St. George pleasantly as they parted in search of partners.

THE LETTER IS READ

The days slipped by almost unnoticed. Then hurried packing, dignified farewells and the flight to Liverpool. It was with little regret that, leaning on the stern rail of the *Carinthia*, Philip saw the shores of England fade and mingle into the grey of distance.

Chapter Twelve

LA VIE GALANTE

AN uneventful nine days' voyage brought them to Boston. The steamer moored shortly after three o'clock, but, by the time Philip had disentangled his belongings from the Customs and checked them to his hotel, it was half-past four. The weather had the unemotional serenity of a fine American autumn. The air was clear and still ; a huddle of clouds to westward, whither the sun was now sinking rapidly, gave promise of a fine sunset. Forcing his way on foot through the crowded streets from the dock, Philip mounted the hill slowly, towards the yellow and terraced bulk of the State House. A few steps further and he found himself on the lofty stretch of Beacon Street above the Common. The western sky was now ablaze, and the broad street sloped away from him down and out into the heart of the sunset. In the distance a hill of luminous purple, its towers and chimneys fur in silhouette, stood out against the colour. The monster eyes of motor-cars crept blazing up the hill. To his left, well below the level of the street, the Common slid rapidly to southward. Across the vivid

green of the grass the dark tree-trunks cut a rhythmic stencil. Between the trunks through a violet haze the grass gleamed. A streak of reflected colour among the trees showed a piece of water. It seemed that the air was full of drifting haze, a haze shot with violet, blue and grey, curling between the branches of the trees, hanging, a tremulous curtain, over the open spaces. Beyond the mazy pattern of twigs and still more twigs, the cliff-like offices of Tremont Street, ranging obliquely, slopingly to south-westward, smiled and glittered at the sunset. Two monster buildings, twin castles, set apart by some hundred yards of lower, older shops and churches, flung the challenge of their myriad eyes across the city. Every window of the vast and box-like structures either shone with the lights within or tossed back the fiery reflection of the dying sun. Their isolation, their incongruity in this old red city, made them doubly symbolic. "There lies the future," thought Philip, "both of life and art. Straight lines, uniformity of design, brilliant lights—and, inside, the ceaseless purr and sigh of the flying lifts, carrying men and women, impulses and ideas, from top to bottom of the social world." Musingly he turned to the quiet, shuttered faces of the old houses, now smeared with the fiery paint of sunset as they fell away to westward, slumbering with closed eyes, proudly dreaming over the sea of mist and twilight. An individual but still, through age, harmonious variety marked their fronts. Here the bow

HYSSOP

windows were semicircular, here square : here the walls were warm with the warmth of old brick, here of grey and lichen-spotted stone or plaster ; here a flight of curving steps led to a classic door and porch, here a sudden shop front had outraged the conventions of a street of fashion and dignity ; at one point, further down the hill, the crenellated but proportionate level of the eaves had been ruthlessly broken by the narrow loftiness of a fifteen-floor apartment house ; in the fading light its sliced and elongated length had the pride of a monolith, its purple bulk solid against the flaming sky. But Philip recognised it as the first seed of the plant which had already produced those two monster stores over there, to take root and flourish in the sacred precincts of residential Boston. Its presence there and the spasmodic outbreak of shop fronts higher up the street were the beginning of the end. Rather to his surprise, Philip found no regret in his heart, except the eternal one that attends the destruction of old and mellow things. The future lay with the other, and only in the future was life.

A sudden recollection made him smile to himself. It had been the occasion of his first attendance at the most exclusive of the college debating societies at Wallace, to which he had been elected, at the end of his first year as one of the three or four "freshers" annually chosen. The debate had been on eugenics and after the opener had made the careful and orthodox speech which ritual demanded, Laddie Macallister, then at the

end of his second year, had got up, slim, languid, ultra elegant. In his musical drawl he had attacked eugenics with that subtlety and innuendo which, when he knew Laddie better, Philip had recognised as being merely his shell of defence. But it seemed that never again did he hear his friend so daring as that night. How childishly superficial it all seemed now, but at the time how amazing! Even the "Basilisks," accustomed as they were to Laddie's methods, and no mean performers themselves in the realm of *joyeusetés*, had shuddered a little at the speaker's audacities. And then, quite suddenly Laddie had paused, knocked out the pipe he was holding in his hand and drawing from his pocket his pouch, said genially: "After all, nothing is so *démodé* as the future; *démodé* because it is essentially feminine. All women face the future not because they are the key to it but because they dare not dwell on the past. The only men who think about it are those who cannot afford the present." And he sat down. Philip, fresh to the conversational conventions of Wallace, and serious to the point of extinction, had, later in the evening, solemnly combated this blatant hedonism, until the unrestrained mirth of the "Basilisks" had revealed to him his dullness. He sat down in confusion, but Laddie had strolled over to him at the end of the meeting and said, with his irresistible smile, "You must come to tea to-morrow and tell me what an 'accouchement' feels like. It's very dull having tea with me, but then it's in the future,

HYSSOP

and the future—as I said ”—and he laughed and left the room. The tea, as will be remembered, had been the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Laddie went down. Philip wished his friend was with him to see this wonderful view. He tried to picture Laddie in Paris and his thoughts carried him far away, till he realised with a start that the air was chilly and that the colours had died from the sky, leaving it a dome of sombre purple-blue, against which, slung it seemed from nothing, two sky signs scampered and flickered, pallidly untiring.

His solitary dinner over, Philip wandered out into the streets with a vague idea of watching the crowds, or dropping into a theatre. He had telephoned to the Merricks at Danvers to announce himself for Sunday night, with the intention of going in a week or so to New York and the serious business of his visit to America; so he was not sorry to have this Saturday evening free. The throng in Washington Street was very dense. For most of the time Philip walked in the gutter, soon acquiring the Bostonian nonchalance proper to the process. It seemed that the gutter and even the whole roadway was devoted to pedestrians, who swayed down the street with solemn geniality, occasionally moving slightly to one side or the other in response to the patient clanging of a tram-car, ploughing its way with difficulty through the press. The lights and voices in this long and entirely inadequate main street delighted Philip. He felt soothed by the easygoing cheer-

fulness of the people. They did not gesticulate, they did not hurry, they did not loiter aimlessly. They moved to and fro steadily, relentlessly, but every face was happy in its grave New England fashion. The women pleased him. They were slim and straight; their clothes were quietly smart. Instead of walking hurriedly with the averted eyes of the nervously chaste, or thrusting their gaze on his with the confidence of the shameless, they gave him looks of interested frankness; one or two smiled a little and Philip, smiling back, wondered whether it was general friendliness or something British in his appearance that had moved them.

Half an hour's stroll, however, at the slow pace dictated by the crowded thoroughfares left Philip rather cold, and finding himself at the glaring porch of a theatre, he entered the vestibule. Several large coloured photographs in frames showed him the performers, principal and otherwise, in the revue then being performed. He stopped before the largest of the photographs, which showed the entire chorus, dressed in a costume which encouraged the spectator to hope that it would, and assured the Mayor that it could not slip off, defiling self-consciously before the camera. Memories of the Sepoys and their musical comedy, combined with a natural taste for revues with their glorious inconsequence and tireless pretence at indecency, inclined Philip to try for a seat. As he turned towards the box office the face of one of the chorus girls caught

HYSSOP

his eye. "She is like someone"—he thought—"who the devil——?" But the memory was gone; he couldn't remember. Still, here was an additional reason for entering.

The box office exclaimed volubly that the angel Gabriel had certainly been keeping an eye on Philip, inasmuch as a ticket had been returned at the last minute, putting within his grasp a stall of unsurpassed comfort and prominence, in a house otherwise full to its back teeth. Suitably grateful, Philip stumbled down the darkened aisle to a front row seat, and by the light of the stage scanned the essentials of his programme.

It appeared that the characters in "Mind the Step" visited in the course of the evening Madison Square, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Grand Cañon, the ballroom in Buckingham Palace, and the home of an imaginary millionaire on Fifth Avenue. Their conversation and singing in each of these places seemed, from the programme, unsuitable, but that of course only time could show. As he was late entering, Philip found he had missed most of Madison Square, but met with ample consolation in the extravagances of the "Ahasuerus Glide," sung by a young lady dressed as Esther would have been if she had dared, and partnered by a youth in a tunic and sandals. Against a background, embodying, presumably, the latest researches into the architecture of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, these two writhed and swayed with truly Oriental voluptuousness. Their solo turn

over, they were joined by Esther's handmaidens, thoroughly accustomed to the vagaries of their mistress, and the syncopations of the catchy chorus went on again. Philip scanned the girls' faces carefully, but not one of them was the one pictured outside who had struck a chord of memory in his mind. Perhaps she was no longer in the company; the photographs were taken long ago in all probability, when first the show opened in New York. It was of no consequence any way.

Esther had vanished and had given place to a frankly American young man in an aviation suit accompanied by a nigger servant. The latter had said very few words before Philip settled down with the purr of pleasure, natural to the music-hall enthusiast who has found a new and wholly satisfying comedian. The genius of the man lay in the utter simplicity and *naïveté* of his performance. In an irresistible way he stammered vague and absurd sentences to the active and, to Philip, irritating young man in an aviation suit. Before long, however, the tiresome airman departed in search of Sadie (his vanished fiancée, in pursuit of whom he had come, led by instinct and a smell of patchouli, to Babylon) and left the nigger servant alone on the stage.

Wandering aimlessly to the footlights, the coon entered into a desultory conversation with the conductor of the orchestra. His stammer became more and more helpless. He groped for his words, he lost himself in a sentence and had to recapitulate from the beginning in a hasty undertone.

HYSSOP

His baby stare swept the audience ; he spoke to invisible enemies in the wings ; he explained that the young lady who sang the " Ahasuerus Glide " was not really Babylonian and that her salary was miserably inadequate. He offered to act a " dramma," and did so, playing every part himself, frequently appealing to the conductor for help in the lines.

After ten minutes or so, he wandered to the wings, looked about him vacantly and vanished. Only the entrance of the young aviator with Sadie (in a slit skirt) dashed Philip's hopes that the nigger would reappear. He sat back in his seat weak with laughter.

Sadie explained to her fiancé that all was well, that she had been snatched from Fifth Avenue, while on a walk, by a djinn and borne swiftly and comfortably to Babylon on a Magic Carpet. Warned by the turn the conversation was taking, the conductor had his baton raised, and at the words " Magic Carpet " launched his orchestra into the preliminary poom pom-pom, poom pom-pom of a waltz song. The chorus of the song brought on a troop of Sadie's friends (also in slit skirts) and once more Philip scanned the row. Almost at once he saw her—and at the same moment he knew not only who the girl in the photograph reminded him of but who she was—Daisy Johnson from the Cornmarket flower shop. There was no doubt whatever that it was she ; but what had brought her here ? Why in the world should she be in a travelling musical show

in America ? In a minute explanations crowded Philip's mind—something must have happened, some misfortune. But why necessarily a misfortune ? Girls often went on the stage of their own free will. She had launched out for herself ; very plucky of her. But Philip knew that this was not so. Her forced smile, the paint and darkened eyelids, the tawdry impropriety of her dress—no, this was necessity. Daisy would never degrade herself thus of her own choice. Something dreadful had happened. And suddenly a taunting flicker of memory threw into his mind's vision the flushed and cruel face of Arthur Burkett. His heart contracted suddenly. He raised his eyes to the stage once more and sought her face only to find that she had seen him. The brazen smile had vanished—in the midst of the hollow brilliance of the stage she stood there and her face was very weary and her eyes were dead. Philip felt his throat dry and choked. Why, oh why, had this terrible thing happened ? But he must see her afterwards—must show her he had recognised her. The song was nearly over. Raising his head markedly he smiled and motioned in the direction of the street. She nodded almost imperceptibly, and her lips smiling once more, filed into the wings with the rest.

Philip dropped his head on his hand and tried to think what he could do. But reminiscence balked him. The images of her as he had used to see her crowded his mind. He thought of her smiling and fresh among the flowers, timidly glad

HYSSOP

to see him and answer his little remarks ; then of the dreaded morning when he had made up his mind to warn her about Burkett, the will power necessary to drive him into the shop, the low-toned conversation they had had behind the huge flower-stand, her pretty blush and gentle but steady voice as she thanked him for coming but assured him she could look after herself ; of the shame and confusion he had felt as he left the shop—and now—the contrast of these memories and the horror of the present numbed him. Miserably he upbraided himself for letting pique preventing his returning to see her. He sought excuses for himself. His last year he had been so busy—but he knew that it was not only that he had been busy. He had been proud, meanly, wretchedly proud—and so he had never gone back again, and this thing had happened. He might have prevented it. It was partly his fault that a pure young girl was now a painted—he shrank from the word, it was too horrible. Perhaps he was mistaken. But the thought of that pale and weary face, those cold dead eyes, extinguished his hopes. There was no doubt, there could be no doubt. And immediately there welled up within him two emotions—a deep, almost reverential pity for all those poor girls whose dancing he had watched with complacent amusement, and an icy hatred for the type of man that Burkett now stood for in his mind. He left his seat and stumbled from the theatre. Not until he had drunk two stiff whiskeys in a

neighbouring bar could he regain anything like composure, or bring himself to think how he could help this pitiful child whose life had made such terrible shipwreck.

No sooner however did he settle to pondering remedies than the hastiness of his conclusions balked him. He had no proof at all that his gloomy conjectures were true. He must wait and hear Daisy's story from her own lips. Probably he was being tragic and absurd. And thinking by a little walk to clear his head, he turned to the Common and there, along its lonely paths, he paced and battled with his fears. In this way the time passed till he reckoned that the performance was nearly over, and he must take up his station at the stage door. As he passed up under the sky signs which had, earlier in the evening, appealed to his sense of beauty and optimism, and saw their mechanical, unending changes of colour, he felt with a rush what a hard, pitiless thing this future would be, and that religion was on the way to be just such a sky sign, far above the heads of the crowd, cryptic, mercilessly regular, a symbol to which the meaning had been lost, so that it remained a winking, automatic emblem. A hot scorn of all those who prated of religion rose within him. He had sat in chapel at College and heard a preacher exhort athletes to use their health and prowess, scholars their learning, artists their genius, in the service of God and of those of his people who were less fortunate than they. Next to him had sat Burkett. Had

HYSSOP

Burkett's athletic powers gone to help others? A storm of loathing swept through Philip, and over the turmoil of his being he heard the voice of little Marvell, the notorious Oxford hanger-on who cringed to the Blues, smirking greasy compliments to Burkett—and the wild, half-drunken applause of the other guests at the farewell dinner given to Burkett and the other Rugger Blues by their admirers. . . .

The stage door of the theatre was in a right-angled alley running from the two intersecting main streets. The walls of the alley were high and dark, and the single gas lamp in the corner threw weird shadows on the grimy brickwork. Even as Philip arrived on the scene (he could not disguise a feeling of bashfulness at his position) a group of workmen emerged from the tall doors which admit the scenery, and behind them Philip saw the planking and framework of the last "set." It being Saturday night and the company a road company, the piece was moving elsewhere the next day, and hence the presence of drays and crates blocking the sordid narrowness of the alley. Philip stepped inside the big doors and watched the gradual demolition of the scene. Not a soul besides the shifters was to be seen. All the company were dressing. In his cynical mood Philip felt a morbid pleasure at the blotched and seedy appearance of the walls and furniture of the Fifth Avenue palace. The canvas was in holes, the marble staircase was cracked wood, the statues chipped and crude. Two of the men

passed him carrying a life-size nude woman in gilded wood, one of a pair that stood at the foot of the staircase. As they reached the door one of the men made a foul jest about their rigid wooden burden, accompanying it with a still more obscene gesture. Philip heard the gust of laughter from the others without, and a shuffling of feet. His anger flamed again. From a flower shop to this. He moved outside once more. The statue was packed in a crate; the waggons were being gradually piled high. The workmen, he was sure, looked at him and smiled to each other. Through the door he saw the rapidly denuded stage with its dusty boards and high rafter-laced roof. He hated himself for thinking it at that moment, but the solemn effect of height and ungarnished emptiness gave him a moment's pleasure. Now if only Gordon Craig would stop fantastic dream designs and try something frankly modern, frankly squalid, but at the same time rigidly plain—— Girls' voices and a laugh made him turn his head. Two figures appeared for a minute in the framed brightness of the stage door and vanished down the alley towards the street. The company were coming out. He pulled himself together and moved nearer. Another girl appeared—not Daisy this time either. He watched her hurry towards the pallor of arc lights; she reached the mouth of the alley and stood a moment; a man who was passing looked at her, stepped up and bent towards her; the next minute her arm was in his and they moved

HYSSOP

out of sight. Philip felt no emotion now ; he was dry and surfeited with disgust ; the time was over for sentimental heroics. A footstep in the passage and Daisy Johnson stood in the doorway.

She saw him at once, and coming forward slipped a gloved hand in his arm and drew him away. As they turned, Philip felt, rather than heard, the chuckle of the workmen. With an effort he turned and looked at Daisy. To his surprise she was smiling gaily, and, as she raised her large eyes to his, he felt her hip and the curve of her breast brush his side and arm caressingly.

" You don't seem awful glad to see me, old dear. Cheer up, you'll soon be dead." Her voice was harsh and coarse. In Oxford her voice had been above the average in a shop girl ; now, the rasp of American Cockney seemed to have conquered, or was it merely the stridency with which she spoke ?

" Guess you didn't expect to get an old friend here ? Well, y'never know y'luck. And I was real glad to see you in front. Why—it's ages since we met. Let's go and have a bit somewhere. Lucky you came in to-night, we move on to-morrow. I might have missed you. Plenty of time before to-morrow tho', ain't there ? " And she leered horribly at him, while once more the hip pressed his, and her hand pressed his arm against her breast. Philip was speechless. But he realised that in the street he could not talk as he must. He summoned a smile.

"Let us go somewhere where we can be alone—in a restaurant partition or something. I've only just landed, so you'll have to guide me."

"Lord ! you are in a hurry to have me alone." Her laugh was shrill. "There's a place down here'll do fine."

As they walked rapidly down the street she continued to chatter, about his having just arrived, about his business in America. "Mean to combine business with pleasure, eh ? You haven't wasted any time." The walk seemed interminable, but at last they reached a hot and subtly dirty restaurant. On either side of the long hall were booths whence, through half-drawn curtains, whiffs of smoke and sudden spurts of laughter escaped into the room. They found an empty booth. An insolent half-breed waiter, whom Philip wanted to kick, asked for their order. To his surprise Daisy selected lemonade. Another period while the drinks and food were fetched. At last the waiter departed for the second time and they were alone. Daisy took off her gloves and veil. Philip saw that her face was painted skilfully but not excessively and her eyes lightly blacked ; an odour of scent filled the booth.

"I've got a nice place here," she was saying (she talked almost incessantly), "in an hotel not far away. Sensible folks—plenty of mattress room and no questions asked. You'll . . ."

"Enough of that, Daisy," he said quietly. "I've not come to talk about that kind of thing."

HYSSOP

I'm sorry you should think it. I just want to know how all this happened."

"How what happened?"

"Well—how you came here, and why? And what this means?" He indicated the squalid booth with its smell of spirits and tobacco.

"Good Lord—you don't suppose I was going to stay on in that damned shop all me life, do you? Not I. I wanted to see life and foreign lands and have fine clothes, so I just came away."

For a moment Philip hesitated. Suppose he was wrong and was going to interfere again where he was not wanted. He thought with horror of the scene that would follow. Her foul recriminations as he tried to go. The eager crowding round of waiters and the other revellers. He had got himself into a nice mess. But he steeled himself. He must go through with it, and if he was to make a fool of himself—well, he would have taken a chance and lost. That was all.

"Nonsense," he replied as gently as before. "It wasn't that, Daisy, and you must tell me. We used to be very good friends once—in Oxford. Now I want to know, please."

She was staring at him in silence. Her smile had died and she looked once more very weary. From behind the wanton beauty of her make-up something of the former girl peeped out. She played with a fork, scraping ridges in the salt, crossing them with other ridges. Then sullenly:

"Why d'you want to know?"

"Because I like to keep in with my friends,

and hear their doings. Besides—I ought to have come to see you during my last year at Oxford—and I'm sorry, very sorry that I didn't. But my last visit was not a success. I poked my nose into your business and very properly you resented it. I suppose I felt I had interfered and was ashamed and kept away. When did you leave Oxford? And it wasn't in order to travel, was it, Daisy?"

"No," she said after a pause, in a low voice—"it wasn't in order to travel exactly."

There was silence. She sipped her lemonade and nibbled a piece of sandwich. Her hands were powdered and manicured. But the flesh of her neck looked curiously dead. Philip busied himself with his oysters, to gain time both for himself and her.

There were several minutes of silence while she sat toying with her food and Philip studied her appearance. The old Daisy came out more strongly every minute. She was fuller in figure; she seemed taller even. Of course she was older. To one who had not known her before, she would be challenging and beautiful. He was puzzled to know why, with such attractions, she was tied to the chorus of a minor touring company. He felt a curious resentment that she had not done better for herself than this. Then the memory of the earlier days swept up again and blotted out all of the present but its tragedy.

Suddenly he saw a tear glisten on her cheek. She took a soiled but expensive handkerchief from

HYSSOP

her bag and dabbed her eyes. But more tears came, and she bowed her head on her hands. Philip sat and smoked his pipe.

After a little time she sat up, sobbing a little quietly, her handkerchief still to her eyes. Gradually her crying ceased.

"Don't hurry to talk, Daisy," he said gently, "there's plenty of time."

"I'm all right now," she muttered, her voice unsteady with tears. And again sat silent. After a moment Philip leant forward :

"Don't answer me this if you don't want to," he said. "Was it Burkett ?"

She didn't move. Then shook her head almost imperceptibly and wept afresh. While she sat, her head in her hands, Philip felt the suspense of mystification. Someone else then. For a moment he felt almost cheered. Perhaps his foolish pride had had nothing to do with the disaster. Perhaps his warning had at least diverted Daisy from one pitfall. But only into another—and even as the futility of self-comfort became evident, from the crouching figure before him came a confused flow of words which recalled him rudely to the dreadful present.

"You warned me, and I wouldn't believe you. You said his friends were a bad lot. But this one seemed so different. And he sort of fascinated me. I felt I didn't care what happened."

"This one ? Which one, Daisy ?"

But she took no notice of the sharp interruption and hurried on, her voice broken with tears :

“ And then when I knew the kid was coming I couldn’t write to him as I didn’t know where he was—an’ father would ’ave killed me, an’ I asked one o’ the girls who wasn’t a bad sort but had had trouble in a ‘ place ’ and she told me a doctor, but he took all my money and made me so ill that mother got suspicious and then it all came out. An’ father was wild and swore he wouldn’t have me in the house and threw me out—an’ I hadn’t anywhere to go, and no money or food, an’ I didn’t know where he was, an’ I went to London and—and——”

She had sat up again, and, as her voice trailed off, a poor little ghost of a smile flickered about her mouth. Philip pressed his hands to his forehead. “ Oh, you poor child,” he murmured, “ you poor little girl,” then with a sudden flash of rage, “ Who was he, Daisy ? Who was the skunk ? ”

“ Don’t call names, Mr. Murray. I loved him—at least I wanted him then. Perhaps I’d love him again if I saw him. As to who he was I only know his first name. It was Graham. He was a cousin of Mr. Burkett’s, and came to stay in Oxford at the beginning of the Long Vac. with him—with Mr. Burkett I mean. And they took me out a lot.”

“ Graham—Graham. . . .” Philip turned the name in his mind. Suddenly the forgotten detail of the river conversation sprang enormously to life—“ My cousin, Graham St. George . . .” Good Lord—Margaret’s fiancé—a cousin of Burkett’s

HYSSOP

—a seducer of shop girls. He thought bitter scorn for a moment, till he realised St. George's code allowed these little distractions if they came the way of the lucky man. And he was plainly a lucky man. Already Philip knew two women who loved him. The collocation of Margaret and Daisy hurt. He forced himself back to the pitiful case before him.

"Then—this—happened—quite soon—I mean—after I'd been in—and spoken about Burkett?"

Again she nodded. "'M. Anyway, even now I sometimes think it was worth it. You can't go on with love in my profession, but it's something to have begun with it. Maybe I'll see him again some day."

Her pathetic courage was worse than her grief.

"Don't, Daisy," he stammered—and put out his hand to touch hers.

"Don't touch me!" she almost screamed, drawing her hand rapidly away. "In God's name don't touch me."

For a moment he looked at her. Then his eye fell on the half-emptied glass of lemonade. In a flash he understood. And he had thought the horror could be no deeper.

"Daisy"—he whispered—"not that—as well?"

When she spoke her voice was hard and steady once again.

"They do say the chances of escape in my job—even when you move in the higher circles so to speak"—his eyes shrank from that ghastly

smile—"is about one in a hundred. Well—I'm not that one."

Philip set his teeth and fought back his nausea. With a sudden effort he regained some semblance of coolness and his brain cleared.

"Look here, Daisy, you must get out of this. If I can arrange to get you out West somewhere—I'm going to see some people to-morrow who will help—somewhere where you can start right over again.—You'll go, Daisy?"

"You're a real good sort, Mr. Murray," she sighed, and her tears were nearer now, "but it's no use. I can't get free of it now, and it'll finish me off some time or other. It isn't as though I hadn't done what I could. When I first came over here—about a year ago—I had a flat of my own in New York and all the money I wanted. He was a decent sort in his way. But one night when he was away, one of his friends brought me home from dinner—and we were both rather full and I suppose the taste for it grows—anyway I let him stay. And he planted me with his filthy disease. As soon as I found out, I went to every doctor in the place, and kept my fellow off all I knew. But he spotted, of course—or rather I told him, he'd been good to me and I didn't see why he should suffer. And—he lost his temper and kicked me out, and most of my savings had gone on doctors. So I had to get what I could, which was only a chorus job. The pay we get isn't overmuch, and you have to live you know. So I've been on the razzle *à la carte*, and I suppose

H Y S S O P

it'll go on till I'm done for. I'd got rid of the pest once all right, but there are birds on every tree. . . . At least I haven't lost my looks yet. The break only happened a few months ago. You're a brick to want to help, but you see it'd only get your friends into bother if I went off and kicked it in the new place and they learnt why. No, I'll go through with it," she concluded wearily. "It's not such a damn fine life that I'll make much push to stay in it."

It seemed that hours passed in silence. Philip felt stunned and hopeless. The shouted announcement of closing time came as a sudden relief. He got stupidly to his feet, paid the bill, and, pushing back the curtains, followed his companion down the restaurant. The place was emptying rapidly, but parties still lingered. From one booth came the hiccough of drunken kisses. In another, the curtains of which were open, a man and a girl sprawled full length on the bench. Philip wondered whether hell was anything like this room. When he stumbled into the street he had to fight the physical sickness which possessed him. But the fresh air revived him.

Daisy walked at his side, two feet away. She was composed but pale under the rouge, and Philip could see her tremble as she walked. A dim lamp over a doorway shed an uncertain light on the pavement. Daisy stopped.

"Here I am," she said curtly, and turned to go in.

"Stop! Where do you go to-morrow?"

"Worcester ; then New York."

"I must see you there. *Must*—do you understand ? I can't think now. This is too vile. But I'll find something, and when I see you in New York we'll arrange to end—this." And his eyes swept the squalid street, the narrow hotel passage with its paintless woodwork.

"It's no use," she replied. "I'd better not see you. You're the first man as has been kind to me since I went the mucker in New York—and somehow it makes it harder. . . ." Sobs caught her breath.

"Well—we won't argue that now. See, take this"—he thrust three ten-dollar bills, all the money he had with him, into her hand—her gloves were on again now—"and good night and God bless you, Daisy." He turned to go. She stepped forward impulsively, but checked herself. Then in gasp, half laugh, half sob, she cried :

"I'd kiss you if only I might—may you be rewarded for this, Mr. Murray. God bl—— no, it's not for me to say that—good night."

Her voice trailed into tremulous silence. With one look in his face, she pushed the swing door of the hotel and walked quickly down the passage and out of sight.

Chapter Thirteen

GOD'S REPUBLIC

DANVERS, MASS.,

"Sunday, Nov. 17.

"DEAR LADDIE,

"At last I have a chance to write you of my doings, which have been varied and tragi-comic—in that order—but always interesting. I'm staying with the Merricks ; Dallas is here of course, and his mother and sister—the whole family in fact. Mr. Merrick died some time ago. They live in a very charming house built just under the lee of a hill with a wide view to southwards, and to eastwards a glimpse of sea. Like almost all the country houses about here, the building is mainly of wood—and has bright green shutters which look fine against the white paint. The garden is a little raw at present—the house is a new one—but is terraced skilfully, and we sit in the late afternoons on the broad verandah which runs along the south and west sides of the house, looking down the grade of lawns and shrubberies into the amazing sunsets they have in this land. Never have I seen such skies ; orgies of scarlet, purple, blue and gold—and the wooded hills

GOD'S REPUBLIC

silhouette themselves, violet and crouching, against the vivid colour. Inside, the house is bare and peaceful; furniture brilliantly scanty and mostly well chosen, with polished wood floors and occasional rugs. The library is the jolliest room—except that its intention is perhaps a shade definitely old English—with shelves on every wall, and over the deep, open fire-place a glorious little Manet—one of those rich brown-yellow studies of a Spanish-looking woman, mantilla and fan and gleaming eye all complete. The books are mainly good;—rather a predominance of the New England poets, the literary blight of this region, and of course the everlasting Burke—but otherwise, besides the good standards, much that shows taste and enterprise.—Burton's 'Arabian Nights' (not the English edition, of course—an American reprint), the complete Henry James, lots of Mosher books, and quite a fine French collection, including heaps of translations of Dostoievsky—I've been revelling in them—reading them all day in fact whenever there were no arrangements. I can't make out the blend of fine and execrable literary taste that many cultivated Americans seem to have. They have made the reputations of several of our very best contemporary men, but at the same time they swallow every specious 'fabrikant' of literature who has the cheek to impose himself on them. Mrs. Merrick is seldom guilty in this way, though she has weaknesses I could mention, and I think Dallas, with his Oxford experience behind him,

H Y S S O P

(and it's hard enough to like anything after going through Wallace !) is a very sound restraint and equally an apt pupil. They read a lot—and, merciful hosts, do not over entertain me but let me browse undisturbed. For the rest, the house is very like an English one—rather less done for you perhaps but infinitely greater facilities for doing things for oneself.

“ I know you are dying to know about Dallas' sister. Most ascetic of voluptuaries, prepare for disappointment. No romances for you because she is only thirteen ! A very lively and beautiful kid, full of curiosity—embarrassingly so at times I imagine—and given to queer little grown-up airs, which come in sudden contrasts to outbreaks of unashamed youth. Mrs. Merrick made a truly epic remark about her which I must repeat to you. The child's name is Henrietta, and after some unusually violent piece of insubordination I ventured that she was a handful.

“ ‘ I tell you, Philip,’ she replied (she called me Philip right off. Such a relief), ‘ I used to think I was a good manager of children. Before I was married, and even while Dallas was young, I used to boast to my friends about it. And then one day God said to me, “ Here's Henrietta. See what you can do about it.” ’ Not bad that, is it ? And she said it with an infinite crispness. She's a dear. You'd love her. We have friendly sparring matches about mutual national failings. They say here the English have no sense of humour. But, even after discounting the generalisation,

GOD'S REPUBLIC

for of course some haven't, I think it's a case of our humour being a stage beyond them and theirs too elementary for us. They are, at bottom, too serious to sit loose enough to life to appreciate nonsense—and the best English humour to-day is nonsense. Their humour is technical—I mean there is always a definite joke which one can parse, so to speak. Well, I always *see* the joke but it doesn't always amuse me. But when I read them 'The Day's Play' they think there's something else coming—and smile attentively after it's all over.

"I had a piece of luck—greater luck than I thought—in being taken yesterday to the Harvard-Yale football match. Dallas had two tickets and insisted on my going with him instead of Henrietta, who has been recently with an uncle. I made the mistake of not being thrilled through at the chance—but soon found out I had come in for something that fifty thousand people would give their ears to see. We motored into Cambridge—about eighteen miles I suppose—and arrived at one o'clock. In the Harvard Courtyard a procession of undergraduates was forming behind a band. Everywhere were groups of men and girls (Laddie, they are lovely most of them), and we were carried along the street with the crowd to the Stadium, which stands on the other side of the river. It is an immense cement building, shaped rather like a wide hairpin, open at one end, with the ground in the middle. Tiers of seats rise to a beautiful, plain colonnade. The

H Y S S O P

open end is filled with a temporary wooden stand. I wouldn't have missed the sight of that crowd for anything—they must have been near fifty thousand strong. Every cranny was filled. The brilliant feathers in the women's hats, against the dark clothes, were like gleaming flowers on heavy foliage. The effect is not unlike those drawings of Lovat Fraser's—black swirls with bright greens, reds and yellows in spots. They sloped down—a trough of humanity—towards the 'gridiron,' as they call the field itself. On the north were the Harvard supporters. On the south the Yale. Throughout the game organised cheering from the respective cheering sections went on. The theory is to give vent to collective (and democratic) enthusiasm, but the practice I suspect to be to confuse the other side at critical moments. I loved the cheer leaders, active and sublimely unselfconscious youths in white sweaters, who postured and swayed in front of the crowd, beating time, swinging their arms, and who, when the cheer was over, sank on to the ground in attitudes that made their limbs look like other people's. Only Matisse has ever conceived men with such decorative legs. I thought the cheers and songs a bit silly, but one thing was grand. Every man in the Harvard cheer-section had a red flag, which he waved during the chief song; suddenly, at the last verse, a skilfully arranged set of men with *white* flags began to wave and there flickered into being, across the quivering red surface of the bank of singers, an

immense white 'H' which swayed and patterned with the rest. It was really splendid.

"I can't tell you about the game as I don't understand it, and you'd be very bored if I did. But the players had on padded drab breeches, like those suburban cycling clubs wear, and shiny skull caps which gave them a Roman look—as though they were wearing helmets. Dallas having learnt how to be excited without becoming either raucous or sweaty, we behaved with some restraint, but the utter abandonment to enthusiasm of men and women of all ages was very remarkable. They might have been present at the dawn of the millennium by their rapture. I think they suspected me, because I was insufficiently hysterical, of having all the evil instincts of a lord with none of his social adornment. We fought our way out to the motor, physical wrecks—at least I was—and so home. I slept like a log last night.

"Now I must tell you of the tragedy of my visit—a tragedy that greeted me, so to speak, on the very threshold of the new world. On top of my original gloom this fresh horror nearly did for me. My first night in Boston I went to a theatre . . ."

As he went on to relate the details of his meeting with Daisy, Philip felt the happiness of the last few days slipping away from him, turning, as it were, to accuse him for his selfish frivolity at the Merricks. That it was St. George, his Margaret's St. George, he could not tell even

H Y S S O P

Laddie. Not that St. George's action was in itself such a source of horror. But although the thing had probably happened before Graham knew Margaret at all, he felt the slight to her, indirect though it was, and this personal feeling was too intimate for others to share. His letter dwelt solely on poor Daisy's plight and the problems of the future. He wished he could hope to hear from Laddie before the time came for the problem to be tackled again in New York, but that was impossible. He finished his letter with a heavy heart, and sealing it up went to get a little air before the day was quite gone. Leaning on the parapet of the terrace he brooded over the great expanse of shaggy woodland, blue violet in the dying light, that rose and fell in waves to the horizon. The scene was very peaceful and serene. On the occasional bare hill-top of short cropped grass the dark close-growing firs stood up dead black against the sky. The shadows clustered in the valleys ; it seemed that he could see the mist curling from tree to tree, stealing by inches up the hill-sides. Overhead, in a sky like water, the stars came out, one by one.

“ So there you are ! I've been searching everywhere. Tea is ready. Are you coming in, or is your scheme to freeze quietly and æsthetically to death in the cause of a fine sunset ? ”

Dallas Merrick's voice roused Philip from his contemplation, and he realised that the night air was very cold. Together they went indoors.

Mrs. Merrick's cosmopolitanism, supported by the Oxford years of her son, had few fruits so grateful to Philip as the habit of daily tea, and he found the table ready in front of the great wood fire in the library. His hostess, to whom advancing years had added graciousness without removing more than the fresh bloom of her beauty, greeted the two young men briskly :

"I thought you were never coming. Why, Philip, you look frozen. Silly boy standing out there so late. Come and get warm. Harry—give Mr. Murray that stool."

Small Henrietta, thus addressed, rose obediently from the low fire-seat and went over to a chair near her mother. Sitting thus side by side the two looked ludicrously alike, and Philip found it easy to see Mrs. Merrick as just such a little girl, small-faced with hard, keenly curious eyes, delicately chiselled features and dark hair decorated with a huge butterfly bow of scarlet ribbon, the colour repeated in the scarlet belt which adorned a black and white tartan frock. Henrietta sat with complete composure, joining now and then in the conversation with the demure precocity which still delighted Philip by its novelty. Mrs. Merrick would discuss all subjects in front of her daughter, and Philip sighed as he contrasted this direct common sense with the tortuous prudery of so many of the English mothers whom he knew. Rather naturally he inclined to regard this American family, the only one he had yet seen at home, as typical, and

HYSSOP

consequently found himself regarding all American mothers as sane in their ideas of education, in favourable comparison to the majority of his countrywomen. Nor did a closer and longer acquaintance with the country do more than modify his view. He felt a wholehearted admiration for the crisp vigour of American girls, their beauty, their smartness of carriage, their lively interest in the world. Equally the equable geniality of American mothers delighted him. They never seemed to fuss or gush about the children but to treat them as rational beings, with their own claims on liberty and consideration, and with only an occasional need for chastisement. He may be said, at the end of this his first week in America, to have fallen in love collectively with American women, and this without any disloyalty to Margaret. She was something by herself, but her world had been denied him. He turned his love for her into an embracing tenderness for the women who surrounded him in this foreign land, and, all unwittingly, his opinion of Margaret's fellow-countrywomen suffered from the reaction. Part of the same reaction was the sense which possessed him of the unworthiness of the American man to mate with these frank and vibrant maidens. He had watched, at the Harvard-Yale game, the neighbouring young girls with their squires, and nearly every time he involuntarily contrasted the electric vitality of the maid with the dry solemnity of the man, unimaginative, literal, superbly but

unconvincingly self-confident. Greater experience taught him that such generalisations were absurd, and American men frequently crossed his path who fulfilled in every way his ideal requirements for the virgin type he idolised, but he never abandoned the conviction that, taken all in all, the women graded the higher of the two sexes.

He now expressed to Mrs. Merrick his admiration of the girls he had seen the day before, and his visions of their ideal destiny.

"Boys are foolish things," she returned, smiling. "Hardly one of those girls would understand a word of your romantic stirrings. They know of life as a round of dances, candy and new frocks. He who provides those is their king."

"Mother is inclined to be spiteful about the girl of to-day," said Dallas. "But I think she was just as bad."

"Perhaps I was, son, but that does not make it any better. I think it is very sad that boys' idyllic dreams should only be appreciated by middle-aged women like myself. Young women are whited sepulchres, Philip. They despise all the magical triumph of a perfect youthful mating—that is, when they aren't shocked by it. A burly football player, a ruthless, untiring business worker, a keen-minded, accurate lawyer—those are their ideals over here. You may have a different type in England, but I doubt it."

Poor Philip was silent. His hostess' words touched his wound, and he was forced to admit to himself that his own attempt to realise his

HYSSOP

ideal had been no great success. Dallas, who knew something of the trouble, changed the subject.

"Philip laughs at our childish enthusiasm for football, just as I ridiculed the supercilious indifference of the crowd at the Varsity rugger match at Queen's Club in London."

"Yes, and very offensive you were," said Philip, his cheerfulness regained with an effort. "I expect he told you, Mrs. Merrick, that we never cheer or shout for fear of disarranging our hair or losing our dignity."

"Why, you know we have a great conception of an Englishman's dignity over here," returned Mrs. Merrick.

"I don't think it's quite a question of dignity. The convention, what we call 'good form,' is against excessive display of any emotion. We thrill with excitement without moving a muscle; our most elemental passions do not disturb the set of our evening shirts. But more than that, I think we are to an absurd degree diffident in public, with a diffidence that often takes the form of apparently disdainful offhandness. Some of us take refuge behind monocles, others find a nervous outlet in carrying a walking-stick, others in cynical chatter—and for all those things we are called supercilious, foppish, decadent. Whereas really we distrust each other so much, and everybody else, that we seek to mask our real feelings behind extraneous trivialities."

"A strange confession from one who hails from

GOD'S REPUBLIC

the earliest home of democracy," said Dallas, laughing.

"Democracy! Good heavens—and you have been to Oxford! We are the least democratic nation in Europe."

"I was pulling your leg, Philip. You should have heard me denouncing Oxford class prejudice on my return. We pride ourselves here on being the real thing, you know, in democracy."

"And so according to your queer literal standards you undoubtedly are. You are almost inevitably more democratic than we are. It is essential for the democrat not to be very critical, and Englishmen are, when educated, hyper-critical. We couldn't endure your fraternities, your class-fellowship, your eternal clubs, your 'getting togethers'—because we should continually see our own foibles and those of the others, and begin to ask ourselves, 'Why are we solemnly gathering here and pretending we have any more in common with each other because we graduated the same year or admire the same politicians, than a man has with his aunts or cousins because some way back they had the same parents? Consequently we shall come to absolute individualism before you, though we must kill off our professional democrats first. They call themselves Radicals. They have photographs of Lloyd George and no sense of humour. The Conservatives haven't even photographs of Lloyd George. But they are a doomed race, the lot of them. Every day more people realise that a lily-fingered duke and a

HYSSOP

horny-handed son of toil are probably equally unsympathetic, and that though here and there a few affinities may drift together, the majority of men, on their socially intellectual side, *must* go their own way if they are to preserve their right to opinion intact. You smile indulgently, Dal, but I defy you to look me in the face and say that your class-mates are like brothers to you. What are they but a charmingly uncomplicated and somewhat over-genial set of men in little hard black hats? You are caught in the torrent of conventional conviviality, and you must bar-lounge and 'jolly-up' to the day of your death, your digestion ruined, your faculties for discrimination blunted, your head filled with loud-sounding political clap-trap, and then you will lie under the sod, while other mates or fratres, equally unwilling at heart but zealous at mouth, will mourn the passing of yet another true American and democrat."

"What an arraignment, Philip," said Mrs. Merrick. "You are letting your tea get cold. There is however something in what you say, and too many people in America mistake bad manners and boorishness of taste for manliness and sociability. All the same, by being less critical we encourage and give play to many of the homelier qualities of goodness, which your exacting standards of taste and individuality never allow a chance to develop."

The discussion raged till dinner and after dinner till bed-time. The next day was Philip's

last at Danvers. He walked with Dallas through vague, untidy woodland, revelling in the air and sunshine.

"I'm a bit excited about New York, Dal."

"Some place, I tell you. But you'll say it's unfinished. All Britishers do. Then they'll laugh at you, and you won't mind a bit which will please them immensely and get you stood drinks."

"You'll be over soon?"

"I don't know. I may. Central Park West, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'm uncertain about the number, but I'll write you. I believe Uncle Roger is a bit of a terror."

"He'll keep you busy, I dare say. Still—it's easier to work hard here than in England."

But Philip would not be drawn, and the conversation drifted to other things. He packed sadly in the evening and woke to pouring rain. The motor drive into Boston was drippy and wretched. From under the hood Philip peered out at a grey and streaming landscape. As the Limited pulled out on its way to New York he felt lonely, and the problem of Daisy loomed over him in his dejection. He threw off the dismal reasoning which always brought him back to the point from which he started, and considered the immediate prospects of Uncle Roger and paper-making. They were poor substitutes. He saw himself the butt of a large office full of raucous clerks who buttoned their gloves and chewed gum.

HYSSOP

Uncle Roger assumed the character of an ill-natured ogre, instigating his staff to persecute his nephew. Paper had no thrills for him. He would have to sort rags or pick oakum or whatever the basest ranks of paper-makers had to do. Altogether things were rotten. The best train-lunch in the world cheered him, however, and he read a novel placidly till the train was sliding on its viaduct across New York's three-figure streets. Their breadth and regularity interested him hugely. So also, after a course of tunnels, did the cavern-like platform of the Grand Central. Well posted by Dallas, he carried his suit-case and strolled self-possessedly to the grille and into the central hall. While he stood absorbing the architecture, admiring the square plain pillars and deploring the futile ceiling, he heard his name rapped out, and turning, saw a short, square man, clean-shaven with rimless pince-nez, simply and expensively dressed in navy blue and a felt hat. Uncle Roger's greeting was tempered with a sense of his condescension in sparing the time to meet his nephew. He seemed surprised and rather hurt that Philip had dealt with his big trunks in the proper way and didn't talk about the "luggage van." Checks having been exchanged with a curt young man behind a mahogany barrier, Philip followed his uncle out of the station. A limousine was waiting, and they were whisked uptown to the door of Uncle Roger's apartment-house overlooking the Park. Together they shot upwards in a lift to the luxurious elevation of

Uncle Roger's flat. It was four o'clock. Cocktails appeared but, of course, no tea. Uncle Roger destroyed Philip's remaining shreds of self-respect by a long and highly coloured harangue on the need for grit and application in business, sprinkled with many insinuations as to the enervating influence of English life in general. He then shut himself in his study and could be heard shouting brusquely down the telephone for the best part of an hour, while his nephew wandered about the flat or stared dismally into the darkness at the lamps that gleamed far below, blurred by the ceaseless rain. So far, he decided, New York was a failure.

To his surprise, however, his uncle, when he reappeared, was geniality itself. They were to dine at Delmonico's and go to a theatre. The evening went with a whirl of light and noise. The dinner was excellent, the wine superb; Uncle Roger the most urbane and entertaining of hosts. Only after midnight, when they stood once more in the library of the flat preparatory to going to bed, did his earlier and harsher side show itself again.

"Breakfast at eight o'clock to-morrow. We go down to the office at eight forty-five. I'll let you off till then the first day; after that you'll breakfast before me, to be down at the same hour as the other clerks. None of that ten o'clock business here you know. Good night."

Philip wondered, as he laid his weary head on the pillow, whether even the evening's gaiety was

HYSSOP

not part of the relentless little man's determination to purge the elegant idleness from his nephew's soul. He groaned as he thought of the short night before him, and immediately fell asleep.

Chapter Fourteen

BROADWAY LIGHTS

UNCLE ROGER certainly had no use for such idle young men as he was compelled, by theory, to consider all Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates to be. Equally certainly he was glad of the chance to improve the shining hours of his nephew's life which had, after being withheld, come unexpectedly and rather mysteriously under his control. In any case he kept Philip hard at it almost from the moment of his arrival in New York.

Having come to America for that very purpose, the boy was not sorry to fill his mind and his time with the strangeness of his new work, and the flat above Central Park seldom saw him for more than the later hours of the evening. Even his Sundays were, before long, occupied with the social duties for which the week's work left no other time.

After a month or five weeks he was tired of scanning the programmes of the lesser outlying houses for Daisy's "revue." He had never seriously expected she would announce her arrival in New York, but he had counted on being able

H Y S S O P

to trace her by the advertisements of the company to which she belonged. Failure to do this forced him to conclude a change of tour to be the reason of her continual absence. It never occurred to him to suspect her of having lied to him about her plans to put him off the scent. Doubtless also his busy days, spent between the office on Broadway and the works on Long Island, helped him to avoid worry by preventing any lengthy prosecution of the search.

On the day after Christmas his uncle summoned him to the gleaming mahogany sanctum with its immense view over houses, river and shipping, and announced a mission to the middle west. Philip was to make a round of visits to the firm's various agents, and his starting-point was to be Chicago. He was to leave New York that very evening, and the tour could hardly be accomplished in less than three weeks. Uncle Roger rapped out his instructions in tabloid form and at a high speed. His business methods saved his own time but wasted that of his secretary, who was inevitably appealed to for more elucidation by the victims of his chief's "speeding up" theories. Philip hurried back to the flat at the unaccustomed hour of five o'clock. He packed a bag and pondered his immediate plans. His Chicago train left New York at ten o'clock. He decided to dine in town and wander about till it was time to go. By six-thirty he had checked his bag at the Grand Central and turned in search of dinner. His mood suggested a band

BROADWAY LIGHTS

and palm trees. In a secluded corner of the Gargantuan he went from oysters to coffee and smoked the excellent cigar that he had never seemed able to afford in England, watching the tables filling up gradually as the hour got later. It was after eight o'clock when he left the restaurant and wandered up Broadway. The whirling sky-signs created the tortured brilliance that has been likened to sunshine in hell. The dense crowds jostled and ogled on the side-walks. In the roadway the long, billowy cars of wealthy theatre-goers purred and whispered, breaking out every now and then with a harsh clarion cry that seemed to flash from their former suavity as the claws of a cat from its velvet paw. Philip moved slowly along intoxicated by the crowd, by the sidelong glances of the women, by the flaring restaurants that gaped their welcomes on every hand. At the corner of Forty-ninth Street he stopped to let a car go by. A man and a girl were standing together on the curb. Her face was in shadow but the man stood in the full glare of an arc-lamp hung low over a tobacco store. It was Graham St. George.

For a moment Philip groped in his mind. Why here——? then he remembered St. George's words at the Carnforths' dance: "We may meet this winter. I have to be out in the States for a week or two in December. My last trip *en garçon*," and he had laughed. As Philip succeeded in accounting for the man's presence here, the girl moved. She was evidently saying good-bye. He

HYSSOP

heard her say, "Good-bye, it's been fine seeing you again." The two touched hands and she turned so suddenly to go that she nearly ran into Philip, standing thoughtfully on the edge of the pavement. He had a vision of a white face and a sudden flicker in the hard, ineffectual eyes.

"Daisy," he cried and stepped towards her. But she had vanished in the crowd.

Again that desperate scramble for mental perspective. Graham—Daisy—Margaret. . . . He sprang after St. George who was walking slowly down the quieter cross-town street, and touched him on the arm.

"Good evening," he said. "We have met after all." St. George looked at him a little vaguely, and then recognition woke in his eyes.

"Oh, how do you do, Murray?" he replied, but with a politeness rather distraught. "Where were you? I didn't see you. Did you recognise my back?"

Philip felt numbed. Explanations, platitudes, theatricalities raced through his mind. In his confusion he shirked the issue.

"No, I saw you on Broadway—in the light," he returned awkwardly.

They walked a few yards in silence. St. George seemed a little surprised at this mute companionship. He broke the silence with a somewhat forced composure:

"What are you doing? Shall we go and have a drink somewhere? I'm sailing to-night on the new Cunarder. She's a wonderful boat, I believe.

BROADWAY LIGHTS

Probably got a full-sized theatre on board and a cricket ground." He laughed without conviction.

Philip made an effort and recounted his occupation in his uncle's firm. "I'm leaving New York to-night too," he said. The remark compelled him to look at his watch. It was nearly nine. Only an hour. "By Jove," he muttered half to himself, "I haven't got long." Then he shook off his paralysis and accepted the proposal of a drink. He hurried St. George towards an hotel that he knew did more day than night business, talking with a sort of feverish dullness all the time. The cellar restaurant was nearly empty. They chose a corner table and ordered drinks—St. George whiskey and soda, Philip the most violent cocktail he knew. The waiter brought the orders and wandered away among the empty tables, his feet echoing on the cement floor and round the vaults of the painted ceiling. St. George lit a pipe and fingered his glass. He regarded his companion curiously. Certainly Philip was behaving rather strangely; St. George concluded the cocktail which had just been swallowed at a gulp was not the first. To himself he smiled indulgently and perhaps a little contemptuously. Suddenly Philip leant across the table:

"St. George," he said abruptly, "I know the girl you were talking to out there on Broadway."

"Well?" St. George was interrogative but perfectly cool. His voice had an undercurrent

HYSSOP

of resentment ; plainly the boy's good breeding had suffered from cocktails.

" And I know," went on Philip slowly in the same hard tone, " thanks to what you did long ago at Oxford, that she is now physically rotten."

As he said this he looked the other straight in the eyes, and St. George's eyes betrayed him. For a moment they swerved and the pupils shrank to pin-points. The next instant he took up his glass.

" You seem to have made a devilish close study of my affairs. Besides, my dear chap, a few words under a lamp-post, even in these scientific days, is hardly intimacy sufficient . . . ?" His voice trailed off into friendly condescension.

Philip's brain grasped at the straw. It was true. He opened his lips to apologise. But his eyes had unconsciously followed the other's action, and he saw the glass of whiskey replaced on the table. St. George had not drunk. All his fears swept over him again with the force of certainties. He braced himself and began, wistfully, almost appealingly :

" I suppose I'm an interfering ass. There's no time to explain how I know about Oxford, but I thought I ought to tell you how things are now. Especially as . . ." he stopped.

" Especially as . . . ?" echoed St. George haughtily.

" There's a thing I should tell you at once. Margaret Wake refused me because she was in love with you."

BROADWAY LIGHTS

St. George stared at him. The pleading misery in Philip's eyes shattered his reserve, and, through the gap, the truth of the position burst upon him.

"Good God!" he whispered. His fingers played mechanical tunes upon the table as he sat utterly motionless, gazing into vacancy. "Good God!" he whispered again. "What a damned coincidence!"

Philip sat in silence. The clock ticked noisily. A group of men trooped down the stairs into the restaurant. They talked and laughed with a nasal clatter that seemed the result of habit rather than good spirits. St. George passed a hand wearily over his eyes; the other continued its mechanical rendering of some soundless ghostly symphony upon the table. He felt first of all a searing flame of self-anger; then a wave of terror set him shivering; finally he saw himself humiliated utterly before a mere boy. Self-pity, by its comforting indignation, helped him to recover his faculties somewhat. Immediately there opened before him the tortuous ways and pitfalls of the future. In his bewilderment he forgot his grievance against Philip and instinctively turned to him, to the only person who shared the terrible secret of his position, for advice if not for sympathy. "Murray," he said quietly, "what am I to do?" Before he could restrain himself Philip flamed out:

"Do! Good God, man, you go and make an unholy brute of yourself and then ask me what to do!"

HYSSOP

"Abuse me all you like afterwards," replied St. George almost humbly, "but for the minute it's more important to face the future. There's none too much time."

Philip read the clock—half-past nine. There certainly wasn't much time. He deliberately killed his rage.

"I'm sorry. I'd no business to talk like that. For the moment the main thing is to gain time to think. You can't sail to-night."

"But how can I explain——?"

"Cable—say you're ill, say any damned thing you like. Then stop here and think for three or four days. At the end you'll be able to face it better."

"Face what?"

"Why, breaking your engagement of course."

"But, Murray, how *can* I? What would Margaret think, and my people and Goring? They'd put every possible wrong construction . . . worse still, they might put the right one. I can't do it. It's not human to expect me to do it."

"If it's human to say nothing and go through with it and risk killing Margaret and maiming your children and children's children then for Heaven's sake let us be inhuman." Philip's anger was rising again. "You can't do a thing like that without paying, you know—and the tragedy of this particular debt is that a man can so easily let others pay for him—innocence is a handy slave for evil. You've had a biggish share in smashing up poor Daisy as it is, but there it's got to stop."

BROADWAY LIGHTS

And here am I checkmated by this damned business journey. I must fly to the Grand Central. Come with me, we'll talk as we go."

They hurried out and got a taxi. In the cab St. George began again :

"It's awful, Murray—just for one little slip ; surely I'll be lucky. After all, I was an old friend—couldn't cut the girl. I may not get anything, you know. Besides there are doctors."

"In a case like this you must assume nothing. Give yourself time and you can be tested. Dash back to England now and it'll be fifty times as hard to make the break. When was the wedding to be ? "

"In a fortnight."

Philip groaned. "I wish I could understand how you ever came to do such a thing, now of all moments. It's incredible."

"It seems so now, no doubt," replied St. George bitterly, "but things looked rosier at lunch time. They were giving me a farewell-to-bachelor-life feed—couldn't be evening because of my boat going then. We all got a bit merry, and then I fall in with Daisy. . . . Damn it, man, be reasonable. . . . I was a swine, of course, but . . ." His excuses were getting peevish.

The cab shot down the station slope and stopped with a jerk. Philip leapt out, all his nerves taut ; contempt, disgust, pity and anger struggled in his mind for mastery. It was ten minutes to ten. Bag in hand, he stood by the platform grille and faced St. George.

HYSSOP

“If you will promise me,” he said slowly, “on your word of honour not to take that boat to-night, and will spend a week here following up in your mind all the difficulties on one side and all the cruelties on the other, you will come to the right decision—and I shall never breathe a word to a living soul of what has happened to-night.”

“If I won’t promise—do you mean to say you’d give me away——?” St. George threw off the hunted look that the last hour had given him, straightened his bowed shoulders and flung the words out with something like his old scorn. “You’re a great deal too ready to poke your nose into my affairs. What the devil has it to do with you?”

“Just this,” replied Philip sharply, “I loved Margaret Wake and I love her still; if I can save her in the least degree from the most savage fate that can befall anyone I will cheerfully violate every canon in the cursed creed of conventional honour that has brought this upon us.”

St. George’s lip curled.

“Your contempt of a gentleman’s behaviour sits very naturally upon you. I congratulate you on holding the winning hand—this time. But Miss Wake may still refuse to recognise her conqueror.”

Five minutes to ten. Philip made a last desperate appeal. The insinuation of jealousy nearly lashed him into another outburst, but he forced himself to be calm.

“What you may think of me is immaterial.

BROADWAY LIGHTS

I repeat that I want your promise, and that if you do not give it I shall act as I think fit."

He paused. The old terror had crept back into St. George's face. The sight softened Philip suddenly.

"For God's sake, man, think of Margaret. You love her, I suppose—what more splendid chance could there be of showing loyalty. I would do any mortal thing to help you; I wish to God I needn't go to-night. What more can I say? Promise, man, in Heaven's name, promise."

"Hurry up there for Chicago," said the official at the barrier. St. George had now regained his self-control. Above all things he must not lose his head. The only danger was that this fool of a boy would go and blurt the whole thing out. That at all costs must be prevented. Once get him off to Chicago and the risk was over. He summoned his dissembling powers and looked at Philip for a second or two in a dazed, uncertain way. Then saying slowly, "Very well. I promise," turned and hastened from the station.

Philip flung himself on to the back platform of the Chicago train as it was moving out. When he had found his seat he sank back on the cushions. A profuse sweat broke out all over his body. He felt as though he was recovering from a long and wasting illness. The transformation of the car for the night journey was an exhausting interruption. His bed at last prepared, he lay with his eyes shut, his every nerve flaccid with the sudden reaction, his mind tired out but wrapped in

HYSSOP

profound peace. "I have saved her," he chanted to himself over and over again. "I have saved her. Saved her . . . saved her."

The beat and rhythm of the wheels took up the refrain till at last the soothing monotony of sound and his own physical exhaustion lulled his weary brain to sleep. The great train surged onwards through the night.

Chapter Fifteen

HYSSOP

HIS thankfulness at the opportunity fate had given him of serving Margaret grew in Philip's mind, until it all but overcame the misery which Daisy's tragic story had caused. He even found peace of spirit enough to supply for himself the details missing from poor St. George's account of the doings of that unhappy afternoon. With some bitterness he pictured to himself the expensive lunch, the toasts and coarse good-humoured congratulations, the emergence from the restaurant of the flushed excited company. It was easy to imagine the rest. He knew enough of New York, even after his short stay, to be aware of the numerous haunts of afternoon pleasure. It was clear enough that Daisy, sickened with the touring company and dreading to be found again, had profited by Philip's generosity to give the manager the slip and, returning to New York, to attach herself to one of those numerous dance-halls that, after the stimulus of rag-time and waltzes, offer the conveniences of the brothel. There would have been

H Y S S O P

more drinks, more mock-regrets at his coming enshacklement, till Graham had lost his head. Chance had thrown Daisy in his way. Perhaps he had even sought her out. There was no proof that they had never met since Oxford. One last fling . . . nearly a fling into hell, anyway. What a miracle, thought Philip, that he was the means of finding out in time the thing that had happened. St. George's personal fate didn't matter in the least ; Margaret was safe. In his exultation he began to feel quite sorry for St. George, for all the justice of the retribution, faced with the humiliations and misconstructions of an engagement broken at the eleventh hour.

Throughout the three weeks of his tour Philip was buoyed up with gratitude to fate. He showed himself eager and capable in the business of his trip, and had the added satisfaction of feeling that laudatory accounts of himself were reaching his uncle in New York, from the various agents visited. A night journey brought him to the Broadway office once more just before noon. His uncle welcomed him without emotion and they lunched together at length, while Philip was catechised on the impressions and results of his tour. At three o'clock he was set free to go home to the flat.

The nature of the journey had rendered impossible any forwarding of private correspondence. It was therefore no surprise to find quite a little pile of letters awaiting him in the library. The

fire was burning brightly, and after a bath and a change of clothes he prepared to enjoy his letters at ease. He paused a minute at the window. The beauty of the scene, the busy street far below from which rose the muffled screech of passing trams, the tree-filled spaces of the park beyond, had the comforting sense of familiar things. For the first time since he left Dallas Merrick he felt a little at home. He turned to an arm-chair and his correspondence. A French stamp caught his eye and Laddie's writing decided him. On opening it he found the letter was dated December 22, nearly a month ago. It must have arrived almost immediately after his departure for Chicago. It was a reply, written after Laddie's usual month's interval, to his from Danvers.

“ 4, PLACE DE LA SORBONNE,
 “ PARIS (VI),
 “ *Dec. 22.*

“ DEAR OLD PHIL,

“ Awfully glad, as you may imagine, to hear from you. You poor dear, fleeing to America for solace. I hope you will manage to forget there. All the proper sort of Christmas wishes to you. My life follows its usual vague and slightly squalid course. I am tiring a little of the eternal irregularity of ‘Quartier’ life. It is stimulating and vividly coloured, but its unconventionality is largely moral and mental untidiness, and I look in vain for our ideal maiden. There are no

HYSSOP

virgins here—girls are born deflowered I believe—that is, if they are intelligent. If they are fish merely, who cares? I am tired of cafés and endless talk and dirty studios and still dirtier stories and gossip. The pictures are lovely, and I never weary of the *quais*, but I am restless to be gone. At times I even think of trying America myself, and settling down in a parvenu household out West. Blatant, strident prudery would be a positive relief after the ostensibly æsthetic sloppiness of Latin-Bohemian manners. How strange it is that Anglo-Saxons, the middle-class of the world, are so proud of their own virtue and yet so morbidly envious of the immorality of other nations. It reminds me of an American I once met who questioned me with eagerness about the vices of the English royal family. It is the same attitude on an ethnological instead of a social scale.”

The letter continued, commenting on Philip's adventures at the Merricks', relating details of the writer's own happenings. The last paragraph read :

“ I cannot write really of the matter of Daisy yet. It has hit me in the face and done more than anything to sicken me of the conventionally-unconventional, messy nonsense I hear on every side about the glorious heritage of the prostitute, the only universal joy bringer, the true aspect of the eternal feminine. It is mere selfishness—

selfishness and cheaply cynical lazy-mindedness. But you will pull Daisy through. Thank God, you found her. I am left pondering on the mess that society and its cowardly arrogance have made in even our limited experience. Daisy, who loved and dared too much ; you, poor man, who loved but was not allowed to dare ; and so far I myself, with all the ideals and all the longing, but either no courage or no opportunity. I am the unscathed—but only because I have not been into battle. Let us hope at least that your lady Margaret will find her happiness. She has deserved no ill of fate, although she has missed a better thing than she will ever know or you ever admit. All the same, because you love her, I can wish her joy and congratulate her, alone of us four, on finding the haven of her choice.

“ Yours as always,

“ LADDIE.”

Philip smiled sadly enough as he folded Laddie's letter. “ Deserved no ill of fate ”—perhaps not, but merit would not have saved her. Only cruelly generous chance had done that. “ The haven of her choice ”—poor ignorant little ship. And she would be miserable for a time over a salvation she would never understand. Once more the wonder of his good fortune returned to him. He, Philip Murray, her rejected lover, had done her as great a service as one human being can do for another. He felt exhilarated, almost happy again.

H Y S S O P

Turning to his other letters he had opened one from his mother when the manservant entered.

“Mail for you, sah. Just come in, sah.”

He offered Philip a tray on which lay an envelope in Jack Cartwright’s sprawly hand. Mrs. Murray’s letter was momentarily rejected in favour of the new arrival. Inside was a sheet of paper enfolding a newspaper cutting. On the paper Jack had written :

“Isn’t the enclosed your Commem. girl? Thought it might interest you. Didn’t know she was going to be married. Good luck. Haste. —Jack.”

With a curious pang of alarm Philip turned to the cutting. It was from “The Times” :

“The marriage between Mr. Graham St. George and Miss Margaret Wake of Chapel Allerton, which was to have been celebrated on January 9th, has been unavoidably postponed till January 30th owing to the illness of the bridegroom. The ceremony will take place, as arranged in the first instance, at St. Margaret’s, Westminster.”

For a moment Philip failed to grasp the meaning of the words. Then the irony of the situation broke upon him. How hideously small, in the hands of modern science, were human tragedies. St. George had won all along the line. At the very end he had triumphed with a simple lie. What a mole-hill was this mountain of Margaret’s

salvation. As he sat and gazed stupidly into the crumbling fire, he almost laughed at the folly of his own idealism.

Outside over Central Park, the January day was dying in mist and greyness.

NEW FICTION

ANGELA'S BUSINESS

A COMEDY OF CONTEMPORARY SPINSTERS

By HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON, Author
of "Queed," "V.V.'s Eyes," etc. 6s.

MILLSTONE

By HAROLD BEGBIE, Author of "Broken
Earthenware," etc. 6s.

JAUNTY IN CHARGE

By Mrs. GEORGE WEMYSS, Author of "The
Professional Aunt," etc. 6s.

THE DEVIL IN A NUNNERY

By F. O. MANN. A First Book. 4s. 6d. net

IN A DESERT LAND

By VALENTINA HAWTREY, Author of
"Heritage," etc. 6s.

THE RECORD OF NICHOLAS FREYDON

ANONYMOUS. 6s.

CONSTABLE & COMPANY LTD.
10 ORANGE STREET, LONDON, W.C.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

REC'D LD-URL

DEC 30 1977

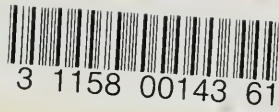
REC'D LD-URL
QL JAN 21 1991

OCT 14 1990

PR Sadleir -
6037 Hyssop.

S126h
cop.2

EM



PR
6037
S126h
cop.2

